F. DOSTOYEVSKY

A FUNNY MAN'S DREAM

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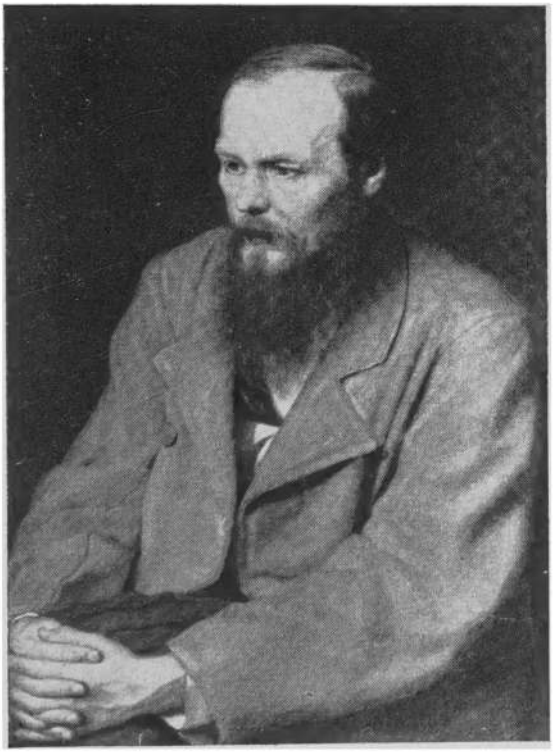
RUSSIAN
LITERATURE



Ф. Достоевский

СОН СМЕШНОГО ЧЕЛОВЕКА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

F. DOSTOYEVSKY

A funny man's dream

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CONTENTS

OUR MAN MAREI . . 9

THE MEEK ONE. A Fantasy . . . 19

Author's Note 21

Chapter One

I. Who I Was and Who She Was 23

II. Proposal of Marriage 29

III. The Noblest of Mortals, Though I Don't Really Believe It 33

IV. Plans, Nothing But Plans . . . 36

V. The Meek One Revolts . . . 40

VI. A Horrible Memory 46

Chapter Two

I. Pride's Dream 49

II. The Veil Dropped Suddenly . . . 55

III. I Understand Too Well . 60

IV. Just Five Minutes Late . 65

A FUNNY MAN'S DREAM. A Fantasy . 69

STEPANCHIKOVO AND ITS INHABITANTS. From Notes by an Unknown . . 95

Part One

I. Introduction 97

II. Mister Bakhcheyev . 118

III. Uncle 135

IV. Tea 151

V. Yezhevikin 162

VI. About the White Bull and the Komarinsky Muzhik 176

VII. Foma Fomich 184

VIII. Declaration of Love 201

It was Easter Monday. The day was warm, the sky was blue, and the sun high, warm and bright, but my soul was steeped in gloom. I wandered aimlessly behind the barracks, staring at the stakes of the sturdy prison stockade and counting them; I did not even feel like counting them that day although it had become a habit of mine. It was the second day of "holiday-making" at the prison: the convicts were not taken to work, many of them were drunk, and quarrels and mutual abuse flared up here, there, everywhere and all the

time. Loathsome, filthy songs were being sung, gambling was going on under the plank beds, and several convicts had already been beaten to within an inch of their lives for outstanding rowdiness by a private court of their comrades, and laid on the beds covered with sheepskins till they should come to and stir back to life; knives were already coming into play—all this, which had been going on for two days, had tormented and distressed me to the point of illness. At the best of times I could not stand these mass drunken revels; they disgusted me, and in this place particularly so. The prison authorities kept away from the barracks during the holiday, and made no raids or searches for wine, for they realized that even these outcasts had to be given rein once a year, or else matters would be even worse. And then, anger flared up in my heart. I came across the Pole, M.* by name, who was a political convict: he glared at me, his eyes flashing and his lips trembling. "*Je haïs ces brigands*!" he snarled in an undertone, and walked past. I went back to the barracks, though I had fled from the place in a frenzy but fifteen minutes before, when six burly men had fallen upon the drunken Tatar, Gazin, to quiet him, and had started beating him up; the fury of their blows had been incongruous—they could have felled a camel with blows like theirs, but they knew that a Hercules like Gazin was difficult to kill, and so they beat him for all they were worth. And now, when I returned to the barracks, I saw Gazin, unconscious and with hardly any signs of life, lying on the plank bed in a far corner, covered with sheepskins; everyone avoided looking at him and uttered not a word. Though they were more than hopeful that he would recover by morning, they had a lurking fear that the man might die after the beating they gave him. I made my way to my place opposite the window with iron bars, and lay on my back, with arms folded under my head, and eyes closed. I liked lying this way best: they would not pester the sleeping

* Alexander Mirecki, who took part in a revolutionary conspiracy against tsardom in Russia. In 1846 he was sentenced to ten years hard labour.—*Ed.*

and so I could dream and think in peace. But I was not in the mood for dreaming then: my heart beat unevenly, and M.'s words rang in my ears: "*Je haïs ces brigands!*" Why describe my impressions, however? To this day those years come back to me in my sleep sometimes, and I know of no dream more tormenting. My readers, too, may have noticed that until now I have hardly ever published anything about my life in prison. As for my *Notes from a Dead House*, I wrote that fifteen years ago, making the narrator a fictitious person, a criminal who had supposedly murdered his wife. Incidentally, I want to add, just as a curious detail, that since then it has been believed by many, and some assert it even now, that I was convicted for murdering my wife.

Little by little I really fell into a doze and imperceptibly entered the realm of memories. All through my four years of hard labour I ceaselessly kept recalling my past and, I believe, I relived my life in memories. They arose of their own accord, I rarely called them up intentionally. It would all begin with some little thing that was quite indiscernible sometimes, and then gradually it would grow into a complete picture, a vivid and strong impression. I would analyse these impressions, putting a new interpretation on what was long past and —what was more important—revising it, revising it all the time, which was the whole point of this amusement of mine. On that particular evening my memory brought back to me, I don't know why, a moment that was incidental in my early childhood when I was only nine, a moment which I believed I had completely forgotten. But at that time I was particularly fond of memories that took me back to my earliest childhood. I remembered a day in August at our country place; it was a dry and clear day, though rather cold and windy; summer was almost over, I would have to go to Moscow soon and once more suffer the boredom of French lessons all winter long, and I was so sorry to part with the countryside. I walked past the threshing-floor, went down into the gully and climbed up to the *Losk*—that was what we used to call the thick shrubbery on the other side of the gully stretching all

the way to the woods. I made my way into the very depths of the thicket, and I remember I heard the sounds of a man ploughing a clearing all by himself, not thirty paces away. I could tell that he was working steeply uphill, that it was hard on the horse, and now and again I caught his shout, "Gee-up!" I knew most of our men, but I could not see who it was; it did not worry me, however, for I was absorbed in a business of my own: I was busy breaking a hazel-nut switch to make myself a crop for whipping frogs; hazel-nut crops are so nice and frail, no comparison to birch crops at all. I was keen on beetles and bugs too, and collected them. Some were very prettily coloured; I was also fond of those swift little lizards, yellow-red with black spots, but snakes frightened me. One came upon them much more rarely than lizards, however. The spot was poor in mushrooms: the birch wood was the place for them, and I was about to go there. There was nothing in the world I loved more than the forest with its mushrooms and wild berries, its bugs and birds, hedgehogs and squirrels, and its dank smell of decayed leaves, so endearing to me. And even now, as I write this, the smell of our birch wood comes back to me: such things remain with you all your life. Suddenly, in the deep silence about me, I heard a shout, clear and distinct: "Wolf! Wolf!" I cried out and, beside myself with fright, rushed out into the glade, screaming at the top of my voice, straight at the man with the plough.

It was our man Marei. I don't know if there is a name like that, but everyone called him Marei. He was a man of fifty or so, thickset, rather tall, with plenty of grey in his square brown beard. I knew him, but I had never had occasion to speak to him before. He brought his poor jade to a standstill on hearing my cry, and when I came on at a rush and gripped the plough with one hand and his sleeve with the other, he saw that something had frightened me badly.

"There's a wolf, a wolf!" I shouted, gasping.

He threw back his head and instinctively looked about him, almost believing me for a moment.

"Where is it?"

"I heard ... I heard some one shouting 'wolf, wolf'..." I mumbled.

"Why, laddie, a wolf indeed! You've just fancied it! No wolf would come here!" he said in a soothing low tone. But I was shaking all over, clutching at his sleeve harder still, and I must have been very pale. He looked at me with an anxious smile, obviously worried and frightened for me.

"Look how frightened you got, laddie, my, my!" he said, shaking his head. "There, dear, there! Look at the lad, my, my!"

He stretched out his hand and suddenly stroked my face.

"There, now, there. Christ be with you, make the sign of the cross now." But I did not; the corners of my mouth were quivering, and this seemed to strike him particularly. He tenderly touched my quivering lips with a thick forefinger, besmeared with earth and black under the nail.

"Look at him, eh!" He smiled at me with a sort of slow, motherly, smile. "Lord, what is it? Poor lad, my, my!"

At last I understood that there was no wolf anywhere and that I had only fancied the shout of "wolf, wolf." The shout had been perfectly clear and distinct, but then I had fancied cries of alarm (not about wolves alone) once or twice before, and I knew it was just fancy. (Eventually I grew out of those hallucinations.)

"Well, I'll be going," I said, looking at Marei timidly and questioningly.

"Go ahead, I'll watch you go. I won't let the wolf get you, never fear!" he said with the same motherly smile. "Christ be with you, go on now," he blessed me and crossed himself. I started off, glancing back at him after every ten steps. Marei remained standing beside his horse, keeping an eye on me as I walked away, and giving me a nod each time I glanced back at him. To tell the truth, I was a little ashamed of myself for letting him see how badly frightened I was, but I was still rather afraid of the wolf as I walked on, climbing up the gully and making for the first threshing-floor; once there, fear

left me altogether, and suddenly I saw our dog Volchok bounding towards me. With Volchok there I felt quite safe, of course, and turned back for a last glance at Marei: I could no longer make out his face very clearly, but I knew that he was still standing there, smiling at me tenderly and nodding. I waved to him, he waved back and started his jade uphill.

"Gee-up!" I heard his shout in the distance again, and once more the jade began to pull the plough.

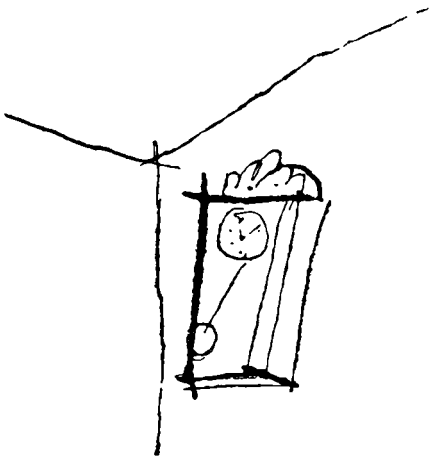
I do not know why the whole episode came back to me suddenly and with such an amazing clarity of detail. I was startled out of my reverie and sat up on the plank bed. I remember I caught a tender smile of remembrance still lingering on my face. I continued with my recollections for another minute.

When I came home that far-off day I told no one about my "adventure." But then was it really an adventure? I very soon forgot all about it and Marei as well. On the rare occasions that I came across him afterwards, I never even spoke to him, either about the wolf or anything else, and suddenly now, twenty years later, in Siberia, I recalled the incident so clearly, to the most minute detail. The memory of that encounter must have lodged deep in my soul of its own accord, without my willing it, and suddenly made itself remembered just when I had need of it. I remembered the tender, motherly smile of a poor serf, his blessing, his nods and his words: "Look how frightened you got, laddie, my, my!" And particularly that thick forefinger of his, besmeared with earth, touching my quivering lips softly, with timid tenderness. Naturally, anyone would have comforted a frightened child, but something entirely different took place at that encounter which no one had witnessed. Had I been his own son, he could not have looked at me with love more radiant and pure, and yet was he obliged to do it? He was our serf and I was, after all, his young master; no one would have learnt of his tenderness to me, or rewarded him for it. Was he so fond of little children perhaps? There are men like that. We were alone in that far and empty field, and

only God from above may have seen with what deep and enlightened feeling, with what delicate and almost womanly tenderness the heart of a rough savagely ignorant Russian serf could be filled, a serf who had no hope or thought then of ever being set free.

Tell me, was not this what Konstantin Aksakov meant when he spoke of the great enlightenment of our people?

And then, climbing down from my plank bed and looking about me, I remember I suddenly felt that I could now see these unfortunate people in quite a different light, that suddenly and miraculously all hatred and anger had vanished from my heart. I walked down the aisle and peered into the faces about me. That shaven outcast over there with the branded face, bawling his hoarse drunken song, was not he another Marei perhaps? I could not look into his heart, could I? I came across M. once again that evening. Poor man! He, for one, had no memories of any Mareis, and no other attitude towards these people than his: "*Je haïs ces brigands*!" Yes, those Poles had a harder time of it then than we did.



THE MEEK ONE

A FANTASY

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Will my readers forgive me for making it just a short novel on this occasion rather than a "Diary" in its accepted form. But this short novel has really kept me busy for the best part of a month. In any case, I crave my readers' indulgence.

Now of the story itself. I have called it a fantasy, whereas I personally consider it highly realistic. There is, however, a fantastic element in it, that is, in the very composition of the story, and this, I think, needs to be explained beforehand.

The fact is that this is neither a narrative nor a collection of notes. Imagine to yourself a husband whose wife has committed suicide only a few hours ago by jumping out of the window. Her body is laid out on the table. He is confused and has not arranged his thoughts. He is pacing his rooms, trying to take in what has happened, and "bring his thoughts to a focus." The man, it must be said, is an inveterate hypochondriac, one of those who talk to themselves. And so he is talking to himself, going over what has happened and trying to take it all in. Despite his seeming coherence he often contradicts himself both in his logic and his feelings. He both justifies himself and accuses her, and goes into irrelevant explanations: coarseness of heart and mind is mingled with depth of feeling. By degrees he does take it all in and "focus his thoughts." A train of memories he has called up bring him at last irresistibly to the *truth*, and truth irresistibly ennobles his heart and mind. Towards the end the very tone of his narrative becomes differ-

ent from its incoherent beginning. The truth is revealed to the poor man rather clearly and definitely, sufficiently for himself to see at least.

So much for the theme. The telling of the story, of course, takes a few hours in breaks and snatches; it is disconnected in form, for he either argues with himself or addresses some unseen listener, a judge as it were. However, it is always like that in real life. If a stenographer could have listened to him and taken it all down, it would have sounded rather less smooth and finished than my account, but I do believe that the psychological sequence would have probably been the same. Now this hypothetical stenographer (whose notes I have given shape to) is what I call "fantastic" in my story. However, something of the sort has been allowed in literature before now: Victor Hugo, for instance, in his masterpiece *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* has resorted to almost the same medium, and though he portrayed no stenographer he made it even less credible by assuming that a man sentenced to death was able (and had sufficient time) to make notes not only of his last day on earth, but also of his last hour and, actually, his last minute. Were it not for this fantastic situation, however, the work itself would not have been—the most realistic and the most truthful of everything he ever wrote.

CHAPTER ONE

I

WHO I WAS AND WHO SHE WAS

... While she is still here it is not so bad: I can come up and look at her every minute, but they'll take her away tomorrow, and what will I do all alone then? She is in the front room now, on the table, they've put two card tables together, the coffin will be ready tomorrow, very, very white *gros de Naples*, oh, but I'm rambling.... I'm walking up and down, up and down, trying to take it all in. I've been trying

for six solid hours but I just cannot focus my thoughts. The thing is that I keep walking up and down, up and down.... This is what happened. I shall simply give the order of events. (Oh, order!) Gentlemen, I am far from being a writer, as you can see for yourselves, but never mind, I shall tell it the way I understand it. But the appalling part of it is that I do understand it all!

Well, if you want to know, or rather to begin at the beginning, she simply came to me to pawn her things in order to pay for her advertisement in the *Voice* that she was a governess seeking employment, had no objection to travelling, was willing to give private lessons, and so on and so forth. That was the very beginning, and naturally I did not single her out from among the others: she just came in like everyone else and that was that. I did single her out later, however. She was so thin, so sweetly fair, above medium height, always rather awkward with me and embarrassed as it were. (I think she was like that with all strangers, and certainly I meant as little to her as the next man, that is, taken as a man and not a pawnbroker.) The minute she received her money she would turn away and leave. She never uttered a word. Other clients argue so, begging and haggling for more, but this one would accept anything.... I believe I'm confusing everything.... Oh yes, the first thing that struck me was the things she brought: gold-plated silver ear-rings, and a trashy little locket—all worthless trinkets. She knew they were worthless, but her expression told me that to her they were precious—and indeed that was all her father and mother had left her, as I afterwards learnt. Only once did I permit myself to sneer at her things. That is, you see, I never permit myself to do it, for I am always the gentleman with my clients: reticent, polite and stern. "Stern, stern and again stern." However, she was once presumptuous enough to bring the remnants (literally the remnants) of an old rabbit-fur jacket, and I was tempted to say something rather facetious to her. Goodness, how she had blushed! Her eyes were blue, big and dreamy, but the way they had blazed up! She did not utter a word, but picked up her

"remnants" and walked out. That was when I noticed her *particularly* for the first time, and thought something of the sort about her, I mean something of a particular sort. Oh yes, I remember another impression, or rather, if you like, the main impression, the synthesis of everything: that is, that she was awfully young, so young she looked about fourteen. And yet she was already sixteen then, three months short of sixteen. That's not what I was going to say, the synthesis was not that at all. She came again on the morrow. I found out afterwards that she had taken her rabbit jacket to Dobronravov and Moser, but those two accept nothing but gold, and so they would not even talk to her. I, on the other hand, once accepted a cameo from her (very third-rate too), and my own action surprised me when I thought it over: I never took anything but gold and silver either, and yet, in her case, I had stooped to a cameo. That was the second time I thought about her, I well remember.

On that occasion, that is after she had been to Moser, she brought me an amber cigar-holder, not too bad if one went in for that sort of thing, but once again of no value to us for we only deal in gold. Since this was the day following her *revolt*, I met her sternly. With me sternness means dryness. However, when I handed her the two rubles I could not help saying with something like peevishness: "I'm only doing it *for you.* Moser would never accept a thing like this from you." I stressed the words *for you* particularly, and in a *particular sense* too. I was annoyed. She blushed again at this *for you*, but said nothing; she did not throw the money back at me, but took it—that's poverty for you! But the way she had blushed! I had hurt her pride, I knew. When she left I suddenly asked myself: was my triumph over her really worth two rubles! Ha-ha-ha! I remember asking myself that question twice: was it worth it? was it worth it? And, laughing, I answered myself in the affirmative. I had a jolly good laugh then. There was no malice in it, however. I had a motive, my action had been intentional: I had wanted to test her, for suddenly my

mind had begun to work in a certain direction about her. That was my third *particular* thought about her.

...Well, that was how it all began. Needless to say, I immediately set to finding out all about her on the quiet, and awaited her coming with particular impatience. I had a feeling that she would be back soon. When she did come I engaged her most politely in a pleasant conversation. I have not been badly brought up, you know, and my manners are good. Hm.... It was then I perceived that she was gentle and meek. The gentle and the meek have poor resistance, and though they do not shed their reserve at all, they simply cannot evade a conversation: they answer curtly but answer they do, and the more you ask the more they say. The important thing is to keep it up, if you're interested, that's all. She naturally told me nothing about herself on that occasion. It was later that I found out all about the *Voice* and everything else. She had been using up her last resources on the advertisements then, wording them haughtily at first, needless to say: "Governess seeking employment, no objection to travelling, state your terms by letter," and then: "willing to take any employment, teacher, companion, housekeeper, sick nurse and seamstress," etc. etc., the usual story. The advertisement was reworded by degrees of course, and finally, when she was close to despair, it actually said: "no salary expected, board only." But no, she found no employment. I decided to put her to the final test then, and picking up that day's *Voice* I pointed out to her an advertisement that said: "Young lady with no family ties seeks employment as children's governess, preferably with an elderly widower. Will take on household cares."

"There, you see, advertising this morning and most probably securing a post by tonight! That's the way to advertise!"

She blushed and her eyes blazed up again. Turning away, she walked out at once. I liked it very much. However, I was already quite confident and bold: no one would accept her cigar-holders. And even her cigar-holders had run out. I was right: she came back two days later looking very pale and upset—I guessed that she had had some trouble at home, and

she really had. I shall explain directly what the trouble had been, but first I want to recall how I suddenly cut a figure for her then and thus went up in her estimation. I did it on the spur of the moment. The thing is that she brought in that icon of hers to pawn that day (was driven to bringing, rather).... Ah, listen, listen! I shall be telling it properly now, I keep confusing everything. What I mean to say is that I want to recall it all now, to the last detail, to the least little thing. I keep striving to focus my thoughts and I can't, it's all those little things, little things, little things.

It was the icon of the Holy Virgin with the Child, an old family icon with a gold-plated silver framework, and the value was, say, six rubles. I could see that the icon meant a great deal to her, for she wanted to pawn it intact, without removing the framework. I said to her: "You'd better leave the frame with me and take the icon home, because, after all, pawning an icon is not quite the thing."

"Why, don't your rules allow it?"

"No, it's not the rules, I only thought that perhaps for you...."

"Very well, take it off."

"Look, I shan't take it off, I'll put it in the icon case over there," I said after some thought, "with the other icons behind the icon-lamp (I've always kept one burning, ever since I first set up business). I'll just let you have ten rubles on it."

"I don't need ten: just give me five, I shall redeem it for sure."

"Don't you want ten? The icon is worth it," I added, noticing her eyes flash again. She said nothing. I handed her the five rubles.

"Do not despise anyone," I said. "I've been in straits like this myself, even worse perhaps, and if you see me thus engaged now... it is only because of all I had gone through...."

"Revenging yourself on society, are you?" she suddenly interrupted me with this rather caustic remark which, however, had much that was guileless in it. (I mean it was innocent of guile generally, for she certainly did not distinguish me from

the crowd then, and so there was almost no sting to her words.)

"Aha!" I thought. "So that's what you're like! There's evidence of character, tinged with new leanings. . . ."

"You see," I quickly put in half-jokingly and half-mysteriously, "I am part of that whole which wants to do evil but does good. . . ."

She quickly turned on me a look of vast curiosity which was much like a child's.

"Wait a minute . . . whose words are they? Where is it from? I've heard it somewhere. . . ."

"Don't rack your brains, it was Mephistopheles presenting himself to Faust with these words. Have you read *Faust*?"

"Not . . . not carefully."

"In other words not at all. You ought to read it. But then I see your lips are curving scornfully again. Please do not think me so lacking in taste that I should attempt to cover up my role of pawnbroker by presenting myself to you as a Mephistopheles. A pawnbroker will always remain a pawnbroker. I know that well enough."

"You are strange, really. . . . I wasn't going to say anything . . . how shall I put it. . . ."

She wanted to say: "I did not expect you to be an educated man." She did not say so but I knew the thought was there; she was very pleasantly surprised.

"You see," I said, "one can do good in any walk of life. I do not mean myself of course. I, for one, do nothing but evil, but then. . . ."

"To be sure one can do good in any position," she said with a swift and understanding glance at me. "Yes, in any position," she suddenly added. Oh, how well I remember all those moments! I also want to add that when the young, our dear young people, want to say something very clever and understanding, their faces express all too sincerely and naïvely: "There, I'm saying something clever and understanding to you now." This does not spring from conceit as with people like me; you can see that they appreciate it all so awfully, believe

and esteem it all, and they fancy that you, too, esteem it just as much as they do. Ah, sincerity! It's their truest weapon. And in her it was so charming!

I remember it all, I have forgotten nothing. When she walked out, my mind was instantly made up. That same day I set out to conclude my investigations and find out all the remaining, current secrets of her life. I had learnt all the earlier secrets from Lukerya, a servant of theirs at the time, whom I had bribed a few days earlier. Those secrets were so shocking that I fail to understand how she could bring herself to laugh and be curious about Mephistopheles' words when her own predicament was so horrible. But that's youth for you! It was precisely this I thought of her then, with pride and joy because there was magnanimity in this as well, as much as to say: "I may be on the brink of ruin, but Goethe's great words are refulgent." Youth is always attended by magnanimity, be there ever so little of it, or be it misdirected. That is, hers, hers alone. The main thing was that I was already regarding her as *mine*, and had no doubts of my power. Do you know it's a most voluptuous feeling when you're no longer in doubt.

But what am I about? If I carry on like this I'll never focus my thoughts. Oh hurry, hurry, it's all beside the point, oh heavens!

II

PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

I shall explain the "secrets" I found out about her in a word; her father and mother had died three years previously, and she was left with some shiftless aunts. To call them shiftless would be putting it too mildly. One was a widow with a large family; six children she had, each smaller than the next one. The other was a spinster, old and bad. Both were bad. Her father had been in the civil service, just a clerk though, and his nobleman's rank was a personal award, nothing more. In short, all this was playing into my hand. I came to them

from a higher world, so to say: after all, I was a retired junior captain of a splendid regiment, a nobleman by birth, a man of independent means and so on; as for the pawnshop, her aunts could feel nothing but respect for it. She had been kept in slavery by her aunts for three years, yet she had passed her school exams somewhere—she had managed to do it, escaping from her cruel drudgery to do it—and that surely proved her yearning for better and nobler things! Look, the reason I wanted to marry her.... However, bother me, at the moment that will keep.... And does it matter? She taught her aunt's children, made their clothes, and towards the end she not only had to wash for them but also scrub the floors, with lungs like hers! To put it plainly, they actually beat her and grudged her her keep. They ended up by wanting to sell her. Ugh! I'll leave out the sordid details. She told me all about it afterwards. A fat shopkeeper who traded next door had been watching all this for a whole year. He was no ordinary shopkeeper, for he owned two grocery shops. He had already driven two wives into the grave, and was now on the look-out for a third. "She's quiet, brought up in poverty, and I'm marrying for my orphans' sake," he reasoned. He really did have children who wanted looking after. He made his suit, he and her aunts began to make arrangements (incidentally, he was fifty), and she was in a panic. That was when she started coming to me in order to pay for her advertisements in the *Voice*. Finally, she begged her aunts to give her time to think it over, even if only a tiny moment. They agreed and granted her a moment, but only one, they refused a second, and made her life a misery. "An extra mouth to feed when we've nothing to eat ourselves." I knew all that already, and on that day, after the morning's conversation, my mind was made up. In the evening the shopkeeper came to call on her, bringing a fifty-kopek pound of sweets from the shop; there she was sitting with him, while I called Lukerya out of the kitchen and told her to whisper in her ear that I was waiting at the gate and had something urgent to say to her. I was well pleased with myself. On the whole, I was awfully pleased all that day.

There and then at the gate, in Lukerya's presence, I told her—adding to her amazement at being called out by me at all—that I should be happy and honoured if.... Next, I asked her not to be surprised at my manner and my proposing at the gate; I told her that I was a straightforward man and was well aware of the circumstances. And I was straightforward, that wasn't a lie. Oh, bother it.... My speech was not only decent, which is proof of my good breeding, but also original, and that is the main thing. Oh well, why think it wrong to admit it? I want to judge myself and I do. I must speak *pro* and *contra* and I do. I know it's stupid, but even afterwards I delighted in recalling it; I told her straight out, without any embarrassment, that for one thing I was not particularly gifted or clever, not even particularly kind perhaps, and something of a cheap egoist (I remember that expression, I had thought of it on my way there and liked it), and it was quite possible that there was much that was unpleasant in me in other respects as well. I said all that with a peculiar sort of haughtiness—we all know how such things are said. It goes without saying that I had sufficient good taste to forebear listing my good points after making a clean breast of my shortcomings: "but instead of that I have this and that," so to say. I could see that she was terribly afraid still, but I did not tone down anything; on the contrary, seeing that she was afraid I purposely made it harsher: I told her straight out that she would have enough to eat, but as for fancy clothes, theatres and balls, there would be none of that, unless later perhaps when I had attained my goal. I was quite carried away by this sternness of mine. I added, as casually as I could, that though I was thus occupied, running a pawnshop that is, I was only striving for a goal, that there were certain circumstances.... But I did have the right to say it: I really did have a goal and certain circumstances. Just a moment, gentlemen, I've hated the pawnshop all my life more than anybody else did, and though it really is absurd to talk to oneself in veiled phrases, I was really "revenging myself on society," I was, I was, I was! And so her sting that morning about my "revenging myself on

society" was unfair. That is, you see, were I to tell her frankly: "Yes, I am revenging myself on society," she would have laughed the way she had done that morning, and it would have really sounded absurd. Besides, I saw that I could play on her imagination with a vague hint here and a mysterious sentence there. What was more, I already feared nothing then: I knew that the fat shopkeeper was in any case more repulsive to her than I, and that I was her liberator. I did appreciate that, you know. Oh, man is particularly good at appreciating vile opportunities. But was it vile of me? How judge a man? Did I not love her even then?

Just a minute: I naturally did not so much as hint at being her benefactor then; oh no, on the contrary, I told her it was *I* who was indebted and not *she*. I actually put it in words; I couldn't help it, and it may have sounded silly because I did notice a fleeting change of expression on her face. But on the whole I was definitely the winner. Look here, once I am recalling all that sordidness, let me recall the last bit of caddishness as well: I was standing there with this running through my mind: "I'm tall, well built, well bred, and, bragging aside, I'm not bad looking." Such were the thoughts exciting my brain. Needless to say, she said "yes," there at the gate. But... but I must add: she stood at the gate thinking for a long time before she said "yes." She was so lost in thought that I was about to say "Well?" but I could not keep the swagger out of my tone and said: "Well then?"

"Wait, I'm thinking."

And her sweet face was so grave, I should have been able to read it even then! But I was vexed, thinking: "Can she be choosing between me and the shopkeeper?" Oh, I did not understand anything then. I understood nothing, nothing at all. I understood nothing until today. I remember Lukerya running after me when I had turned to go, stopping me and saying with a gasp: "God will reward you, kind sir, for taking our dear miss, but don't you tell her this, she's proud."

Oh, she's proud, is she! I like proud little girls. The proud are especially good when... well, when you no longer doubt

your power over them, eh? Oh, what a vile, coarse man I am! Oh, the pleasure it gave me! Do you know, when she was standing there at the gate thinking hard before saying "yes" to me, which I found puzzling enough, do you know what she may have been thinking in fact? "Since it's misery here and misery there, isn't it best to choose the worst at once, that is the fat shopkeeper, let him beat me to death when he's drunk and the sooner the better." Eh? Tell me, could she have been thinking that?

But even now I don't understand it, I understand nothing even now! I have just said that she may have been thinking she should choose the worse of the two evils, that is the shopkeeper. But which one of us appeared worse to her then, the shopkeeper or I? A shopkeeper or a pawnbroker who quoted Goethe? It's quite a question. What question? Don't you understand even that much? There's your answer lying on the table, so what question could there be? And then, bother me anyway. The point is not myself at all.... Incidentally, what do I care now whether the point was myself or not? That's something I absolutely cannot solve. Perhaps I should go to bed. My head aches....

III

THE NOBLEST OF MORTALS, THOUGH I DON'T REALLY BELIEVE IT

I could not fall asleep. How could I with that pulse throbbing in my brain. I want to take it all in, all that sordidness. Oh, sordidness! The sordidness I rescued her from then. Surely she ought to have understood and appreciated my action? I also indulged in various pleasing thoughts such as the notion that she was only sixteen while I was forty-one. This disparity fascinated me; it was gratifying, most gratifying.

I wanted our wedding to be *à l'anglaise*, that is just the two of us with two witnesses, one of whom should be Lukerya, and then straight into the train and off to Moscow perhaps (inci-

dentally, I had some business to attend to there), to a hotel for a fortnight or so. She objected to this; she would not allow it, and I was compelled to pay courtesy calls on her aunts, the way one does on parents whose daughter one seeks in marriage. I conceded the point to her, and the aunts received their due. I went so far as to give those hags a hundred rubles each, promising more to come, telling her nothing of all this of course, so as not to offend her with the vileness of the whole affair. The aunts instantly turned meek and mild. We also had an argument about her trousseau: she had nothing, almost literally so, but then she wanted nothing. I managed to prove to her, however, that it was not done, and I provided the trousseau, for who else would have done it? Oh, bother me. I did tell her at the time, however, about some of my ideas to give her an inkling at least. I was rather hasty about it perhaps. The main thing was that from the very first, though she tried to curb the impulse, she offered her love to me impetuously, welcoming me eagerly when I came to call in the evening, prattling happily (charming, innocent prattle!) about her childhood and babyhood, her parents' home, her father and mother. But I instantly dashed cold water on all that rapture of hers. It was dictated by the idea I had, you see. I responded to her transports with silence, gracious silence of course . . . but still, she soon grasped that we were different, and that I was an enigma. And to be an enigma was what I was striving for mostly. My whole stupid attitude was maintained for that very purpose. First and foremost—sternness. I kept it up until after the wedding. In short, even though I was satisfied then, I evolved a whole system. Oh, it took shape without any effort on my part. But then I could not have acted differently, I was compelled to evolve that system because of one extraordinary circumstance—but really, why am I piling calumny upon myself? The system was right. No, no, listen to me, because you must know the circumstances if you are to pass judgement on a person. . . . Listen.

I don't know how to begin because it is all so difficult. It's difficult when one begins to plead one's own case. You see

how it was: youth despises money, for instance, and so I instantly made much of money, I laid stress on money. I did it so tellingly that she grew more and more silent. She opened her great eyes wide, listened, looked, and grew silent. You see, young people are magnanimous, that is to say good young people are magnanimous and impetuous, but they lack tolerance, and the moment anything falls short of what they expect, they turn scornful. And I wanted broad-mindedness, I wanted to implant broad-mindedness right in her heart, in her heartfelt point of view, do you see? I'll give you a vulgar example: how was I to explain my pawnshop to one such as she? I naturally did not blurt it all out to her, for then it would have appeared that I was making excuses for my pawnshop, and so I resorted to proud silence, so to say, I practically spoke in silence. I am a past master at speaking in silence. I have spent a lifetime speaking in silence, I have lived through whole dramas in silence alone with myself. Oh, but I too have known unhappiness. I have been discarded by all, discarded and forgotten, and no one, no one at all knows about it. And then for that slip of a girl to pick up that gossip about me from certain cads and to believe that she knew all, while all that mattered remained locked in this breast alone! I kept silent, I kept pointedly silent with her all the time until yesterday—why did I? Because of my pride. I wanted her to find out for herself, without my prompting and certainly not from the cads' stories, I wanted her *to perceive the man I was* by herself, and understand me. Since I was bringing her into my home I wanted her absolute respect. I wanted her to stand in awe of me for my sufferings—it was my due. Oh, I have always been proud, I've always wanted all or nothing. It was precisely because I rejected half-measures in happiness and wanted all that I was forced to take that attitude: "find out for yourself and appreciate my worth." Because you must agree that had I gone into explanations of my own accord, prompting her, cringing and pleading for respect, it would have been the same as begging for alms. However, why speak of all that?

It's stupid, stupid, stupid! I explained to her frankly and cruelly then (I stress the word cruelly), in a few words, that magnanimity in the young was charming but not worth a thing. Why wasn't it? Because it was cheaply acquired, granted to them before they began to live; it was nothing but "life's first impressions" so to say, but I'd like to see them practise it first. Cheap magnanimity is always easy, laying down one's life is cheap too, because it's nothing but young blood and vigour seeking an outlet, a passionate desire to do something handsome. Oh no, try your magnanimity in a feat that is difficult, unseen and unheard, with no splendour to it, attended instead with calumny and great sacrifice, and not a drop of glory—a feat when you, radiantly pure, are exposed as a cad before the world whereas there is no one equal to you in honesty on earth—I'd like to see you try a feat like that, but no, you would back out of it. And I—my whole life has been nothing but a feat like that. She argued with me at first, oh, so hotly, and then she began to say less, grew completely silent and only opened her eyes terribly wide listening to me, such big intelligent eyes. And ... and what was more, I suddenly caught a smile upon her face, a mistrustful, silent and evil smile. She wore that smile when I brought her into my home. It's also true that she had nowhere else to go....

IV

PLANS, NOTHING BUT PLANS

Which of us two had started it first?

Neither. It all started of itself at the very outset. I have already told you that I affected sternness when I brought her into my home, but I toned it down immediately. She had it all explained to her before the wedding that she would take my place in the pawnshop, accepting things in pawn and handing out the money, and she had made no objection then (note this). What is more, she actually tackled the job with

zeal. Well, naturally, the rooms and the furniture all remained unchanged. There were two rooms: one was the large front room with the pawnshop partitioned off, and the other, also large, was our room—bed- and living-room. The furniture was poor; even her aunts' was better. My icon stand with the icon lamp was in the front room where the pawnshop was; in the other I had my book-case with a few books in it, my chest of which I kept the keys, and then the bed, tables and chairs, of course. I told her before the wedding that I was allowing a ruble a day and no more for our food, that is, hers, mine and Lukerya's, whom I had enticed away from the aunts; I explained that I had to save thirty thousand in three years, and this was the only way to make money. She raised no objection, but I increased the allowance by thirty kopeks of my own accord. It was the same with the theatre. I told her before the wedding that there would be no theatre-going, and yet I went and allowed it once a month, decently too, in stalls. We went three times and saw the *Pursuit of Happiness* and *Singing Birds* I think it was (oh, bother it, bother it!). We went in silence and returned in silence. But why, why did we affect silence from the very first? There were no quarrels at first, you know, but still we were silent. In the beginning I remember, she had a way of glancing at me stealthily; the moment I noticed it I stressed our silence. It's true that it was I who overdid the silence, and not she. As for her, she had one or two outbursts when she shrew herself into my arms; but since the outbursts were morbid and hysterical, while I wanted solid happiness, respectful on her part, I responded coldly. And I was quite right, for these outbursts were inevitably followed by a quarrel the next day.

That is, there were no quarrels, but silence again, and more and more insolence in her expression. "Revolt and independence" was what it implied, only she did not know how to go about it. Yes, her meek expression took on more and more insolence. You must believe me when I say that I was becoming loathsome to her; I made a study of it, you know. And then of course there was no doubt that her outbursts carried her

away. For instance, how could she suddenly start sneering at our poverty after the filth and misery she had come from, floor scrubbing and everything? You must see that it was not poverty, but economy, and where necessary there was even luxury—in linen, for instance, and cleanliness. I had always imagined that cleanliness in a husband appealed to a wife. It was not poverty she scoffed at, however, but my alleged stinginess. "So he has a goal, has he, he's showing off his strength of character." She suddenly cancelled our theatre-going herself. And her scornful expression grew more and more pronounced ... and I grew more silent, more silent.

After all, why make excuses for myself? The crux of the matter lay in the pawnshop. But look here, I knew that a woman, a sixteen-year-old girl at that, could not help becoming completely subjugated to a man's will. There is no originality in women, that's self-evident; it's evident to me even now. What if she is lying on the table there? Truth is truth and even Mill himself could do nothing about it. And a loving woman, oh, a loving woman will idolize the vices, even the crimes, of the man she loves. He himself would never think of such excuses for his crimes as she will find for him. It's magnanimous but not original. It's lack of originality alone that has been the undoing of women. What of it, I repeat, what if you do point to that on the table over there? Why, is there any originality in that which is on the table? Oh! Oh!

Listen: I was certain of her love then. She did come flying to me and threw herself on my neck even then. She loved me, or rather—she wanted to love. Yes, that was it: she wanted to love, longed for someone to love. What is more, there was no such crime in evidence here for which she would have had to find excuses. A pawnbroker, you say, and everyone says. What if I am a pawnbroker? Obviously, there must be reasons why the most magnanimous of men had become a pawnbroker. You see, gentlemen, there are certain ideas ... that is, you see, certain ideas which, if put into words, would sound terribly stupid. You'd shrink with shame. Why? Just so. Because we are all rotten and cannot stand the truth, or I

don't know why else. I have just said "the most magnanimous of men." It sounds funny, and yet it really was so. It's the truth, you know, the most truthful truth. Yes, *I had the right* then to want to have some security and to open this pawnshop. "You have cast me aside, you—that is people—have driven me away with your scornful silence. When, passionately impulsive, I appealed to you, you reciprocated with an insult to last me a lifetime. And therefore I am justified in walling myself in away from you, saving my thirty thousand rubles and ending my days in the Crimea somewhere, on the south coast, in the mountains and vineyards, on my own estate bought with this thirty thousand, and what is more, away from all of you, but without bearing you malice, carrying an unblemished ideal in my soul, with the woman I love close to my heart, and a family—God willing—spending my days in helping the neighbouring villagers." It's all right, of course, saying all this about myself now, but would it not have been the utmost folly to have enlarged upon this out loud to her then? Therefore the proud silence, that's why we lived in silence. Could she have understood? Sixteen, youth's awakening—why, what could she have made of all my excuses, my sufferings? Straightforwardness, no worldly wisdom, youth's cheap convictions, purblindness of "noble hearts," but the deciding factor in this was the pawnshop, and there you are! (But was I a villain in my pawnshop? Did she not see the way I ran it? Did I ever drive unfair bargains?) Oh, how terrible truth is in this world! This darling, this meek one, this heavenly one—she was a tyrant who cruelly tormented my soul. I would be wronging myself if I did not say that. Do you think I did not love her? Who is there to say that I did not love her? You see, it was a wicked irony of fate and nature. We are the accursed, altogether there is a curse on the life of men (mine particularly), I do understand now that I had been wrong somewhere. Something went wrong somewhere. It had all been clear, my plan was as clear as the skies: "Stern and proud, a man who has no need of anyone's moral support or consolation and is suffering in silence." It really was so.

No, I wasn't shamming, I wasn't! "She would see for herself afterwards that there was magnanimity in this, only she had failed to notice it, and then, when she did see it, she would appreciate it tenfold and, clasping her hands to her breast in entreaty, would be reduced to dust." So much for my plan. But there must have been something I had left out of account or had forgotten to do. There was something I ought to have done there and did not. But enough, enough. And whose forgiveness should I beg now? Once it's over, it's done. Courage, man, think of your pride! You are not to blame!

Very well, I shall speak the truth, I shall not shrink from facing the truth: *she* was to blame, *she* was to blame!

V

THE MEEK ONE REVOLTS

Our quarrels began with her suddenly taking it into her head to determine the loans in her own way, overvaluing the things brought in pawn, and once or twice actually treating me to an argument on the subject. I stood my ground. But the captain's widow turned up just then.

An old woman, a captain's widow, came to pawn a locket, her late husband's gift, the usual sort of souvenir. I gave her thirty rubles. She began to whimper and whine, begging me not to let it go—well, of course, I shouldn't. Suddenly, five days later, she came back bringing a bracelet that wasn't worth eight rubles as a substitute; I refused, quite naturally. My wife's eyes must have told her something even then, for she came again when I was out and had her locket exchanged for the bracelet.

On learning of it the same day, I spoke to my wife gently, but firmly and reasonably. She was sitting on the bed, staring at the floor and tapping the rug with her right foot (a habit of hers); an evil smile hovered on her lips. And then, without raising my voice at all, I calmly told her that the money was *mine,* that I had the right to *my own* point of view, and that

I had concealed nothing from her as she well knew when I first proposed that she should share my home.

All at once she leapt up, shaking all over, and—would you believe it—suddenly began to stamp her feet at me. She was a wild beast; it was a fit; she was a wild beast in a fit. I was speechless with amazement: an outburst like that I had never expected. But I did not lose my presence of mind; I did not so much as stir, and once again, in the same calm voice, I told her straight out that I would not allow her to take part in my business forthwith. She laughed in my face and walked out of the flat.

The point of this is that she had no right to leave the flat. Not a step without me, I had made that condition before the wedding. She came back towards evening: I did not say a word.

Early next morning she went out again, and the following day again. I locked up my pawnshop and went to see her aunts. I had severed all relations with them immediately after the wedding, neither receiving them nor calling on them. I was only to learn that she had not been to them. They heard me out with great curiosity and then laughed straight into my face. "Serves you right," they said. But I was expecting their laughter. I lost no time in bribing the younger aunt, the spinster, with a hundred rubles, and paid her twenty-five in advance. Two days later she came to me and said: "There's an officer, Yefimovich by name, mixed up in this, a lieutenant in your old regiment." I was astonished. This Yefimovich had done me the most harm in my regiment, and about a month ago he had the impudence to come into my pawnshop, not once but twice, pretending he was a client, and I remember him chatting and laughing with my wife. I went up to him at once and told him not to dare come back again in view of what had passed between us; but nothing of *that* sort occurred to me then, I simply thought he was brazen-faced, that's all. And now her aunt informed me that she had already made a rendezvous with him, and that all this business was in the hands of a certain Yulia Samsonovna, an old friend of the

aunts, a widow, and a colonel's widow at that. "It's to her your wife keeps running now," I was told.

I shall make this part short. The whole thing cost me all of three hundred rubles, but it was arranged that two days later, when my wife was to have her first intimate rendezvous with Yefimovich, I would be standing behind the door into the next room and listening to all that was being said. In the meantime, the day before the rendezvous, we had a scene which though brief was of great significance to me.

She came home in the evening, sat down on the bed and, tapping the rug with her foot, turned a mocking stare at me. Suddenly, as I looked at her, it struck me that all that last month, or rather all that last fortnight, she had not been herself at all; I should even say the exact opposite of herself: a violent creature, aggressive, I should not exactly say shameless, yet an unbalanced creature eager for turmoil. A creature asking for turmoil. Her meekness, however, stood in the way. When one of her kind goes wild you can see, even though she has overstepped all limits, that she is merely forcing herself to it, whipping herself on, and that she herself is fighting a losing battle against her chastity and shame. That is why the meek are sometimes liable to overstep the limits, so much so that one's intelligence denies belief of what one has witnessed. A woman with whom depravity is a habit will, on the contrary, invariably tone down the outburst, making it fouler but maintaining a guise of decency which aspires to unchallenged supremacy over you.

"Is it true that you were kicked out of your regiment because you were too much of a coward to fight a duel?" she suddenly asked me, her eyes flashing.

"It is; the officers' court requested me to leave the regiment, but actually I had already sent in my papers before that."

"They kicked you out for a coward!"

"Yes, their verdict said I was a coward. But I had refused to fight that duel not because I was a coward but because I had not wanted to obey their despotic verdict and challenge

someone to a duel when I did not consider myself insulted. I assure you," I couldn't hold back the words, "that actively rising against such tyranny, with all the ensuing consequences, took much more courage than fighting any duel in the world."

I couldn't hold back the words and they sounded as if I were trying to justify myself. This new humiliation of mine was just what she wanted. She laughed with malice.

"And is it true that you tramped the streets of St. Petersburg for three years after that, begging for alms and sleeping under billiard tables at night?"

"I've taken shelter both in Sennaya Square and in the Vyazemsky Home. Yes, it's true: after the regiment I suffered much disgrace and degradation, but never moral degradation, because I myself was the first to deplore my actions even then. It was merely a degradation of my will and mind, for which my desperate position alone was responsible. But it's over. . . ."

"Oh yes, you're a personage now—a financier!"

That was an allusion to the pawnshop. But I was quick to take myself in hand. I could see that she was longing for more explanations, humiliating to me, and so I did not give her the pleasure. A client came in most opportunely just then, and I left her to attend to him. It must have been an hour later that she suddenly appeared dressed for the street and, coming up to me, said:

"And yet you told me nothing of this before the wedding, did you?"

I made no reply, and she walked out.

And so, on the following day, there I was standing behind the door into the next room, listening to my fate being decided. There was a revolver in my pocket. She was sitting at the table, wearing her best clothes, and Yefimovich was posing and mincing in front of her. What happened then? Why, it all happened precisely the way I had imagined and supposed it would happen (and I am proud to admit it), although I was not aware at the time that I was imagining or supposing it. I don't know whether I'm making myself clear.

This is what happened. I stood listening for a whole hour; for a whole hour I was present at a duel between the noblest and purest of women and a society cad, lecherous and obtuse, with the soul of a reptile. Where, I thought in amazement, where had that naïve, meek and retiring creature learned all that? The wittiest of comedy of manners' authors could not have created this scene of taunting remarks, the most naïve of laughter, and virtue's holy contempt for vice. And what brilliance of speech and repartee, what quickness of wit, what truth in her condemnation of him! And at the same time what a world of almost girlish artlessness! She laughed in his face at his protestations of love, his gestures and his proposals. He had come unprepared for any resistance to his crude attack and now he seemed to shrink with the suddenness of it. I may have thought at first that it was sheer coquetry on her part: "coquetry of a depraved but sharp-witted creature, to set a higher value on herself." But no, the truth stood out, radiant like the sun, and there was no room left for doubt. Only her assumed and rash hatred for me could have driven her, inexperienced as she was, to arrange this rendezvous, but when it came to the point the veil had instantly dropped from her eyes. She was simply casting about for a way to insult me with whatever means she had, but the sordidness of what she had set out to do had repelled her. And could one as immaculate and innocent, one who cherished an ideal, be attracted to Yefimovich or any other society brute? He only made her laugh at him. All that was sterling in her soul was roused, and indignation called forth sarcasm from her heart. I repeat that towards the end the buffoon was completely dazed and sat there scowling and hardly able to make reply; I was even afraid that he might dare insult her out of a low vengeance. I repeat once more: I'm proud to say that I heard out this scene practically unamazed. It was like encountering something I already knew. It was as if I had expressly gone there to encounter it. I went there believing nothing, none of the accusations, although I did put a revolver in my pocket, but it is the truth. Could I have thought of her differently? Why did

I love her then, why did I hold her so dear, why had I married her then? Oh yes, of course, that scene more than convinced me of her hatred for me, but it equally convinced me of her purity. I put an abrupt end to the scene by opening the door. Yefimovich jumped to his feet, I took her by the hand and invited her to come with me. Yefimovich collected his wits together and suddenly gave a peal of ringing laughter.

"Oh, I would not encroach upon the holy ties of matrimony! Take her away, take her away! And do you know," he shouted after me, "even though a decent man should not fight a duel with you, with all due respect for your lady I'm at your service.... That is, of course, if you would risk it...."

"Did you hear that?" I held her back for a moment in the door.

After that I uttered not another sound all the way home. I led her by the hand, and she made no resistance. Rather the contrary; she was terribly impressed, but only until we reached home. Once there, she sat down on a chair and stared at me fixedly. She was exceedingly pale; though her lips instantly curved in a sneer, her look was now solemn and rigidly defiant. I think she sincerely believed during those first few moments that I was going to shoot her with my revolver. But I drew it out of my pocket without a word and placed it on the table. She stared both at me and the revolver. (Note this: she was already familiar with the revolver. I had bought and loaded it the day I opened my pawnshop. I had decided against keeping great watchdogs or a powerful footman, the way Moser does for instance. My cook admits the clients. I keep a loaded revolver handy because in our trade one simply must have something to defend oneself with, just in case. When she first came into my house she was very curious about the revolver: I explained to her the way it worked and, moreover, once talked her into shooting at a target. Note all this.) Ignoring her frightened look, I lay down on the bed, half-undressed. I felt quite spent; it was already close on eleven.

She sat on without moving for about an hour, then blew out the candle and without undressing lay down too, on the sofa, close to the wall. It was the first time that she did not come to bed with me—note that as well....

VI

A HORRIBLE MEMORY

And now that horrible memory....

When I woke up in the morning it must have been some time after seven for the room was almost light. I was wide awake at once, with all my senses alert. I opened my eyes. She was standing in front of the table, holding the revolver. She did not know that I was awake and watching her. And suddenly I saw her coming towards me, revolver in hand. I quickly closed my eyes pretending I was fast asleep.

She reached the bed and stood over me. I heard everything: dead silence reigned in the room, but I heard the silence. One nervous twitch, and I was compelled to open my eyes against my will. She was looking straight down at me, straight into my eyes, and the revolver was already close to my temple. Our glances met. But the look we exchanged lasted less than a second. I forced myself to close my eyes again, resolving on the instant with all the strength my soul possessed not to stir again or open my eyes no matter what awaited me.

It does happen sometimes that a man, though fast asleep, opens his eyes suddenly, even raises his head for a second and looks about the room, then lays it no the pillow again, without waking up, and sleeps on without remembering anything. Since I had suddenly closed my eyes again and remained as motionless as one fast asleep after meeting her glance and feeling the touch of the revolver at my temple, she could certainly assume that I was indeed asleep and had seen nothing; besides, it was more than incredible that I should have closed my eyes again at a moment *like that*, having seen what I had seen.

Yes, it was incredible. Still, she may have guessed the truth —this flashed through my mind in the same fleeting instant. Oh, the whirl of thoughts and feelings that flashed across my mind in less than a fleeting instant, and praise be to the electricity of human thought! In that case (I felt) if she has guessed the truth and knows that I was not asleep, she will have been crushed by my readiness to meet death and now, perhaps, her hand will falter. Her earlier resolve will have been shattered, perhaps, by this new, astonishing revelation. They say that looking down from a great height one is drawn irresistibly into the abyss at one's feet. I believe that many suicides and murders are actually committed simply because a revolver has already been picked up. It is just another abyss, a 45-degree slope which one cannot help sliding down, and an indomitable something compels one to pull the trigger. However, awareness that I had seen everything, knew everything, and was silently awaiting death at her hand, would perhaps save her from slipping down the slope.

The silence continued, and suddenly I felt the cold touch of steel on my temple, close to my hair. Was I definitely hopeful that I would escape, you will ask. I shall answer you as in the presence of God: I did not entertain a shred of hope—my chances were one in a hundred perhaps. Why was I accepting death then? And now it's my turn to ask you: what use was life to me when a revolver had been pointed at me by the one I adored? Besides, I knew with all the power of my being that the moment meant a fight for supremacy between us, a terrifying life and death duel, a duel fought by that same coward of yesterday who had been thrown out by his comrades for cowardice. I knew it and so did she, that is to say, if she was aware that I was not asleep.

Perhaps there was none of this or perhaps I did not even have those thougths at the time, but still it all must have been so, be it subconsciously, for I did nothing but think of it afterwards every hour of my life.

You will ask me again: why did I not save her from committing a crime? Oh, I asked myself that very question thou-

sands of times afterwards, every time I recalled that moment with an icy shiver running down my spine. But then my soul was steeped in gloomy despair: I was perishing, so how could I save anyone? How do you know whether I wanted to save anyone at the time or not? Who knows what I may have been feeling then?

My senses were astir, however: seconds passed, there was dead silence; still she stood over me, and suddenly I trembled with hope. I quickly opened my eyes. She was no longer in the room. I got up from the bed; I had won and she was vanquished for ever!

I came out for breakfast. We always had our breakfast served to us in the front room, and she always poured out the tea herself. I sat down in silence and took the glass she handed me. I looked at her after five minutes or so. She was dreadfully pale, even paler than the night before, and she was looking at me. And suddenly, when she saw that I was looking at her, her pale lips quivered in a pale smile, and her eyes asked a timid question. I thought: "So she is still in doubt and wondering: does he know? Did he see?" I looked away indifferently. After breakfast, I locked the shop and went to the market-place where I bought an iron bedstead and a screen. On return I had the bed placed in the front room and screened off. The bed was to be hers, but I did not say a word to her. Words were superfluous, for the bed told her that *I had seen everything and knew all*, and that there was no longer room for doubt. When I went to bed, I left the revolver on the table as usual. That night she silently lay down in her new bed: our marriage was dissolved, she was "vanquished but not pardoned." She was delirious during the night, and acute fever set in towards morning. She was ill for six weeks.

CHAPTER TWO

I

PRIDE'S DREAM

Lukerya has just told me that she will not stay with me and will leave as soon as the mistress is buried. I have been praying on my knees for five minutes, whereas I wanted to pray for an hour, but thoughts are thronging my mind, all of them sick thoughts, and my mind is sick—so what's the use of praying . . . it's sinful, that's all. It is also strange that I do not want to sleep: when a disaster, a great disaster befalls one, one always wants to sleep after the first, most violent parox-

ysms of grief are over. Men sentenced to death are said to sleep most soundly on their last night. But that's only right; it's nature, otherwise one could not endure it. I lay down on the sofa but I did not fall asleep....

...During the six weeks she was ill we nursed her day and night. Lukerya and I, and a trained hospital nurse I had hired. I spared no expense, and I even enjoyed spending money on her. I called in Dr. Schroeder and paid him ten rubles a visit. When she recovered consciousness I tried to keep out of her sight. However, why describe it? When she was up and about again, she came into my room and mutely and silently sat down at a table apart, which I had also bought for her at the time. Yes, it's true, we said nothing to one another; that is, we did begin to talk later on, but it was trivial talk. My taciturnity was intentional, of course, but I very well saw that she, too, was glad she did not have to say too much. I thought it quite natural of her. "She is utterly overwhelmed and vanquished," I thought, "so naturally she must be given a chance to forget and adjust herself." And so we lived in silence, but I spent every minute of mine in preparing myself for the future. I thought she was doing the same, and I enjoyed myself tremendously trying to guess just what she was thinking about then.

Another thing: no one knows of course the anguish I went through, bemoaning her as she lay ill. But I bemoaned her in silence and stifled the moans in my breast so that even Lukerya should not hear. I would not entertain the thought, I could not even imagine her dying without learning everything. And yet, when her life was no longer in danger and she began to recover, I very quickly and effectually regained my peace of mind, I remember that well. More than that, I decided to *postpone our future* for as long as possible, and meantime carry on with the present state of affairs. Yes, a very strange and peculiar thing happened to me then, I do not know what else to call it: I had triumphed over her, and aware-

ness of it alone seemed to satisfy me completely. And that is how we spent the whole winter. Oh yes, I was satisfied, more satisfied than I had ever been, and it went on all winter.

You see, there was one horrible circumstance in my life which had until then, that is until the day of the catastrophe with my wife, been weighing down on me, every day, every hour, and that was—the loss of my good name and my discharge from the regiment. To put it briefly, I had been the victim of despotic unfairness. It is true that my comrades had disliked me because I was difficult by nature or perhaps because I was funny, but then you know how it is sometimes: a thing you hold dear, cherish and revere, unaccountably evokes laughter from a crowd of your comrades. Oh, no one ever liked me, even at school. I was disliked everywhere and always. Even Lukerya does not like me. And though dislike for me lay at the bottom of what had happened in the regiment, the upshot was undoubtedly a matter of accident. I am mentioning this because nothing could be more aggravating and intolerable than being ruined through mere blind chance, through an unfortunate sum of circumstances which might well have dispersed like clouds. It is humiliating for a creature of intelligence. This is what happened.

One night, at the theatre, I had gone into the buffet during the interval between acts. A certain hussar, A. by name, walked in and in a very loud voice began to tell two other hussar friends of his, for all the other officers and civilians present to hear, that Captain Bezumtsev of our regiment had been making trouble in the corridor and was "apparently drunk." The others did not pick up the conversation, and then it was not true anyway, because Captain Bezumtsev was not drunk at all and the trouble was not any trouble at all. The hussars began to talk of something else and so the matter ended, but by the next morning the story had filtered into our regiment and all our officers immediately began to say that I, the only man of our regiment present when A. spoke so insolently of Captain Bezumtsev, ought to have gone up to him and silenced him with a reprimand. But for what earthly

reason? If he bore Bezumtsev a grudge, it was their own private affair, and why should I meddle? It now appeared to the officers that it was not a private affair but one that concerned the whole regiment, and since I had been its only representative there the other officers and civilians present could have taken my attitude as proof of our regiment tolerating officers who were not over-scrupulous about their own honour or their regiment's. I could not agree with their reasoning. I was told that I could still set matters right even at this late date by formally challenging A. I refused to do so, and, being annoyed, I refused haughtily. After that I sent in my papers at once, and that's all there was to the story. I had retained my pride but I was crushed in spirit. I lost my will and my power of reasoning. It so happened just then that my sister's husband in Moscow had finished squandering the little capital we had, including my own share, a tiny share, it's true, but it left me penniless and homeless. I could have taken on a post, but I did not: I could not see myself donning a railwayman's coat after the splendour of my uniform. And so—if it had to be shame, let it be shame; if it had to be disgrace let it be disgrace; if it had to be degradation, let it, the lower the better—such was my choice. My recollections of the next three years are gloomy, they even include the Vyazemsky Home for the destitute. A year and a half ago my godmother, a rich old woman, died in Moscow and quite unexpectedly remembered me in her will among others, bequeathing me three thousand rubles. I thought matters over and decided my fate there and then. I decided on the pawnshop because that way I would not ever have to make excuses for my past. Money, a home, and a new life away from my old memories—such was my plan. Nevertheless, my gloomy past and the irretrievable loss of my honour and good name tormented me every hour, every minute. And then I married. Was it chance or not, I do not know. However, when I brought her into my home I thought I was bringing in a friend, for I wanted a friend very badly. I clearly saw, however, that the friend had to be prepared,

shaped and even vanquished first. And could I have explained anything to that prejudiced sixteen-year-old child without preliminaries? For instance, if it had not been for the horrible catastrophe with the revolver and the help it so opportunely rendered, could I have proved to her that I was no coward and that my regiment had unfairly accused me of cowardice? The catastrophe had been most timely. My self-control at the point of the revolver was my revenge for all my gloomy past. And though no one else would ever know about it, *she* did, and that meant everything to me, for she herself meant everything to me, all the hope my future held for me in my dreams! She was the only person I was preparing for myself, there was no one else I wanted at all—and now she knew everything: at least she knew that she had been unfairly hasty in joining the ranks of my enemies. This thought delighted me. She could no longer think me a cad, just a queer man perhaps, but even this thought did not really displease me after what had occurred: queerness is not a vice, rather the reverse, for it sometimes appeals to women. In short, I put off the dénouement purposely: what had taken place was more than enough for my peace of mind for the moment, and provided a wealth of visions and material to weave into my dreams. The trouble with me is that I am a dreamer: I had a sufficiency of material, and as for her I thought she could *wait*.

So the winter passed, in expectation of something. I enjoyed stealing glances at her as she sat at her table. She did needlework in the daytime, and in the evenings she sometimes read, taking the books out of my bookcase. My choice of books should have spoken well for me too. She hardly ever went out. I used to take her for a walk every day after dinner before it grew dark, and we would take a stroll but not as silently, however, as before. I made a point of trying to make it appear we were talking pleasantly and were not silent, but, as I have already said before, neither of us wanted to be too expansive. It was intentional on my part, but as for her I thought she had to be "given time." It's curious, of course, that it had never once occurred to me until the very end of

the winter that while I enjoyed stealing looks at her I had never, in all this time, caught her looking at me. I thought it was timidity. Besides, she looked so timidly meek, so weak after her illness. No, I thought, I'd better bide my time, and suddenly "one day she'll come to you herself."

This thought had an irresistible fascination for me. I will add that occasionally I could not help working myself up and actually bringing my spirit and mind to a point where I seemed to feel wronged by her. This would last for some time on every occasion. But never was hatred able to ripen and take root in my heart. I myself felt that it was really nothing but a game. And never, never could I think of her as a criminal, not even when I set our marriage adrift by buying her the bed and screen. And it was not because I judged her crime with flippancy; no, it was because I had the intention of forgiving her completely from the very first, even before buying the bed. In short, it was queer of me because I am a stern judge of morals. She seemed to me so vanquished, so humbled and crushed that I pitied her poignantly at times, albeit I positively liked the thought of her humiliation. I liked the idea of this inequality of ours.

I happened to do several good deeds that winter. I took the opportunity to cancel two debts and give one poor woman a loan without taking anything in pawn. I told my wife nothing about it, but then I did not do it for her to find out about, either. But the woman came in to thank me, she all but knelt before me. And so it leaked out; I fancied she was really pleased to find out about the woman.

Spring was approaching, it was already the middle of April, the winter frames were taken out of the windows and the sun lit up our silent rooms in bright clusters of rays. But the veil hung over my eyes and blinded my reason. That fatal, terrible veil! I do not know how it came about, but the veil dropped suddenly, and all at once I saw and understood all. Was it chance, was it the ultimate day, or had a sunbeam fired my dulled brain to thought and understanding? No, it was neither thought nor understanding, it was a certain nerve

which had all but died away, suddenly stirring and twitching back to life, lighting up the whole of my dulled soul and my devilish pride. It was like a jolt. And it did happen suddenly and unexpectedly. It happened before sunset, at about five in the afternoon....

II

THE VEIL DROPPED SUDDENLY

A word or two before I go on. I noticed a strange pensiveness in her one day a month before; it was not just silence, but pensiveness now. That, also, I noticed suddenly. She had been sitting with her head bent low over her sewing, and she did not know that I was watching her. And then, all at once, it struck me that she had grown so thin and frail, her face was so pale and her lips so bloodless—all this, together with her pensiveness, gave me a frightful shock. I had heard her dry little cough before, at night mostly. I got up at once and without telling her anything went out to call Dr. Schroeder.

The doctor came the next day. She was very much surprised and kept glancing from Dr. Schroeder to me and back again.

"But I'm quite well," she said with a vague little smile.

Schroeder did not give her a very thorough examination (these medical men are sometimes conceitedly careless), all he said to me in the other room was that it was the after-effect of her illness, and that when spring came it would not be a bad idea to go down to the sea or, if that could not be done, to simply move into the country. In short, he told me nothing except that it was weakness or something like that. When the doctor left, she gave me a frightfully serious look and said:

"I'm quite, quite well."

Saying this she suddenly blushed, apparently with shame. It must have been shame. Oh, I understand it all now: it shamed her that I, who was still *her husband*, was worrying about her as if I were still her real husband. But I failed to understand it then and put her blush down to humility. (The veil!)

And then, a month after that, in April, at about five in the afternoon of a bright, sunny day, I was sitting at my desk, doing my accounts. She was sewing at her own table in our room, and all of a sudden I heard her . . . singing, very, very softly. The novelty of it had a staggering effect on me, which I cannot explain to this day. Until then I had hardly ever heard her sing, except perhaps in the very beginning, when I first brought her into my home and we could still amuse ourselves by practising target shots. She had a rather strong and ringing voice then, and though not very true it had a very pleasant and healthy sound. Her singing was so-pathetic now—oh, it wasn't a sad song (it was some romance or other), but there was something sickly and broken in her voice, as if it could not cope with the song, as if the song itself was sick. She sang in an undertone, and on a high note her voice broke off—such a poor little voice and it broke off so pathetically; she cleared her throat and took the song up again, very, very softly.

People may laugh at my agitation, but no one will ever understand why I was so agitated. No, I felt no pity for her yet; it was something entirely different. At first, at the very first at least, I was puzzled and terribly surprised, terribly and strangely, the feeling was unwholesome and almost vengeful. "What, singing! And in my presence! *Can she have forgotten about me?*"

I remained where I was, quite overwhelmed, then I got up, took my hat and walked out, without knowing what I was about. That is, I did not know where I was going and why. In the hall, Lukerya helped me into my overcoat.

"Does she sing?" I found myself asking Lukerya. She did not understand, and stared at me without understanding me; however, I was really difficult to understand then.

"Is this the first time that she is singing?"

"No, she sings sometimes when you are out," Lukerya replied.

I remember everything. I walked downstairs and went out of the house and started aimlessly down the street. I came to

the corner and stood there, staring into space. People walked past me and jostled me, but I was immune to it. I called a cab and told the man to take me to Police Bridge, I don't know why. All at once I changed my mind and gave him a twenty-kopek tip.

"That's for your trouble," I said, smiling at him stupidly, a strange rapture surging in my heart.

I turned homeward, hurrying my step. That poor little broken note suddenly rang in my soul again. It took my breath away.The veil was dropping; it was dropping, dropping. Her breaking into song in my presence meant that she had forgotten about me—that's what was so clear and frightening. My heart knew it. But my soul was filled with rapture, and it was stronger than fear.

Oh, the irony of fate! Why, I must have carried this rapture in my soul all winter; there could have been nothing else in it, but then where had I myself been all winter? Had I been at one with my soul? I ran up the stairs in my impatience, but I can't tell whether I went in timidly or not. All I remember is that the floor seemed to sway, as if I were floating down a river. I walked into the room, she was sitting, sewing, with her head bent as before, but she no longer sang. She gave me a fleeting, incurious glance, but it wasn't a glance, it was just a reflex, natural and meaningless, when someone comes into the room.

I came straight up to her and sat close beside her, I was like one crazed. She looked at me quickly with something like panic; I took her hand, I don't remember what I said to her, or rather what I had meant to say, because I could not even speak properly then. I could not master my breaking voice. But then I did not know what to say, I just gasped.

"Let's talk . . . d'you know . . . say something," I mumbled something as inane as this, but oh, could I be sensible then? She trembled again and recoiled from me, terrified, staring into my face, and suddenly the expression in her eyes changed to *stern amazement.* Yes, it was amazement and it was *stern.* She looked at me wide-eyed. Her stern expression, her stern

amazement dealt me a crushing blow. "So you want love as well, do you? Love?" This amazement of hers seemed to ask, although she said not a word. But I read it all in her face, all. My whole being was shaken, and I fell at her feet. Yes, I fell at her feet. She jumped up quickly, but I gripped both her hands with all my strength, and held her there.

Oh, I was aware of my desperation, so well aware! But would you believe it, the surge of rapture in my heart was so overpowering, that I thought I would die. I kissed her feet in rapture and happiness. Yes, in happiness, which knew no bounds or measure, and this in spite of my awareness of how little hope there was for me in my despair. I wept and I tried to say something, but words failed me. Suddenly her fright and amazement gave way to an expression of anxiety, a dire question, and she now looked at me queerly, wildly even, there was something she was impatient to understand, and she smiled. She was terribly ashamed that I was kissing her feet and she pulled them away, but I quickly kissed the floor where her feet had stood. She saw it and suddenly began to laugh because she was ashamed (you know how one laughs when one is ashamed). She was becoming hysterical, I saw; her hands were twitching—but I did not give it a thought and went on muttering to her that I loved her, that I would not get up from my knees. "Let me kiss the hem of your gown... let me worship you like this all my life...." I don't know, I don't remember—she suddenly burst into sobs and began to shake; she had a dreadful fit of hysterics. I had frightened her.

I carried her to her bed. When the fit passed, she sat up, looking terribly stricken, and, clutching my hands, begged me to calm down. "Come, don't torment yourself so, come!" and began to cry again. I did not leave her side all that evening. I kept telling her that I would take her to Boulogne, to the seaside, that I would take her now, at once, in a fortnight, that she had such a broken little voice, I had heard it that day, that I would close my pawnshop, I'd sell it to Dobronravov, that everything would begin anew, but the main

thing was Boulogne, Boulogne. She listened and was still frightened. She grew more and more frightened. But what mattered to me mostly was not this, but that I wanted more and more irresistibly to fall at her feet again, and go on kissing the floor her feet had touched, and worship her. "I shall ask nothing, nothing more of you," I kept repeating, "do not answer me, ignore me completely, just let me look at you from afar, make me your thing, your dog. . . ." She wept.

"*And I thought you'd leave me like that,*" the words escaped her so involuntarily that perhaps she was not even aware of having said them, and yet they were the most momentous and fatal words, the meaning of which was more inexorably clear to me than anything else that evening and which was like a knife thrust at my heart. It explained everything to me, everything, but while she was there beside me, while I could look at her, hope carried me away irresistibly and I was terribly happy. Oh, I tired her out completely that evening, I knew it, but the thought that was with me all the time was that I'd make everything different at once. Finally, towards nightfall, she seemed quite spent and I talked her into trying to fall asleep, which she did, immediately and soundly. I was afraid she would be delirious; she was, but very slightly. I kept coming up to her almost every minute, I tiptoed to her in my slippers and looked at her. I wrung my hands in anguish looking down on that poor, sick creature in her wretched cot, that three-ruble iron bed I had bought for her. I knelt beside her, but I dared not kiss her feet while she slept (not against her will!). I knelt before the icons to pray, but jumped up again. Lukerya kept an eye on me, appearing from the kitchen every now and again. I went out to her and told her to go to bed, that beginning tomorrow everything would be *quite different.*

And I did believe it, blindly, madly, and terribly. Oh, the elation that flooded my being! All I wanted was for tomorrow to come. I refused to admit misfortune, despite the symptoms.

Although the veil had dropped, reason had not returned entirely to me then, and it did not for a very, very long time, not until today, it only returned today. But then how could it have returned earlier? She was alive, she was there before me and I was beside her. "When she awakes I'll tell her all this, and she'll see everything." Such was my reasoning then, simple and clear, and therefore I was elated. The trip to Boulogne was uppermost in my mind. For some reason I imagined that Boulogne meant everything, that Boulogne held the key to something conclusive. "To Boulogne, to Boulogne!" I was madly impatient for morning to come.

III

I UNDERSTAND TOO WELL

And yet it was only a few days ago, five days, only five days ago—last Tuesday! No, no, if only I had a little more time, if only she had waited a bit, I would have dispelled the gloom! and she had calmed down, hadn't she? The very next day she listened to what I said with already a smile on her lips, in spite of her perplexity.... Her perplexity, or was it shamefacedness, was the main thing about her then, all those five days through. She was also afraid, very much afraid. I am not denying it, I shall make no crazy contradictions: she was afraid, but then how could she help being afraid? We had become strangers to one another such a long time ago, had become so unused to one another, and now suddenly all this.... However, I ignored her fear, for I was dazzled by the vision of our new life!... It is true, it is the indisputable truth, that I made a mistake. There may have been more than one mistake. As early as the following day (it was Wednesday), the moment she woke up I immediately made a mistake: I suddenly made her my friend. I was hasty, much too hasty, but I had the need to confess, it was essential that I should—and it was much more than a confession. I concealed nothing, not even things I had concealed from myself all my life. I told her

frankly that all that winter I had been confident of her love and had entertained no other thought. I made it clear to her that the pawnshop had been nothing more than my loss of will-power and reason, my own personal idea of self-flagellation and self-glorification. I told her that I had really been a coward in the buffet that day because of my over-sensitiveness: the situation and the buffet made me shrink, the thought made me shrink that supposing I suddenly stepped forward would it not appear foolish? It was not the duel that frightened me, but the thought of appearing foolish. It had been too late to admit it afterwards, and so I made everyone suffer, I made her suffer for it too, and that was why I had married her to make her suffer for it. Altogether I spoke as in a fever most of the time. She took my hands in hers of her own accord and begged me to stop. "You are exaggerating . . . you are tormenting yourself"—and then she began to cry again, and again it ended in something like a fit. She kept imploring me to tell her nothing of this, and not to recall things.

I took little or no heed of her pleas: the spring, Boulogne! Our sun, our new sun was there. I could talk of nothing else. I closed my pawnshop, Dobronravov taking over the business. Then I suddenly asked her if she would not like us to give away all we had to the poor, all except the original capital of three thousand left me by my godmother which we could spend on our trip to Boulogne, and on return to begin life anew, working for our living. That's what we decided upon, because she said nothing . . . but merely smiled. And it must have been her tact prompting that smile more than anything else, so that I should not feel hurt. I did see that I was irksome to her, you know, please don't think that I was too stupid or too selfish not to see it. I saw everything, everything to the least trifle, I saw and understood it all perfectly; my despair was utter and unconcealed.

I talked about myself and about her. About Lukerya too. I told her that I had wept. . . . I used to change the conversation too, trying to keep her from recalling certain things. And she did brighten up once or twice; I remember it, I do!

Why do you say that I looked and saw nothing? if only *this* had not happened, everything would have been resurrected. Because she did tell me—it was only the day before yesterday when our conversation touched upon literature and the books she had read that winter—she did tell me that scene of Gil Blas with the archbishop of Granada, laughing at the recollection. And her laughter had been so sweet and innocent, exactly like before when she was my fiancée (oh, fleeting moment!); and I was so glad! However, her telling me about the archbishop struck me forcibly: it meant that she had been untroubled and happy enough in her loneliness that winter to enjoy a masterpiece. It meant that she had been already becoming quite easy in her mind, that she was already coming to believe that I would leave her *like that*. "I thought you'd leave me *like that*," was what she said to me that Tuesday, you know. Oh, it was a thought worthy of a ten-year-old girl! And she did believe in it, she did believe that everything would really be *like that*: she at her table, I at mine, and the two of us remaining like that till the age of sixty. And all of a sudden, there I was, coming to her, a husband, and a husband who wanted love! What a misunderstanding, what blindness on my part!

Another mistake of mine was that I gazed at her enraptured. I should have held my emotion in check, for rapture frightened her. But you know, I did hold my emotion in check, I did not kiss her feet any more. I never once hinted that I was... well, that I was a husband. Oh, nothing could have been further from my thoughts, all I did was to worship. But I could not remain completely mute, I could not help saying something! I suddenly went and told her that I enjoyed her conversation tremendously and considered her incomparably better read and educated than myself. She blushed a bright red and shyly told me I was exaggerating. And then, fool that I am, I blurted out to her how much I had admired her when, standing behind the door that day, I had listened to her duel, to her innocence duelling with that brute, how much I had admired her intellect, her brilliant wit, blended with

such child-like artlessness. A shudder seemed to run through her, again she murmured that I was exaggerating, but all at once a shadow crossed her face, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed. Well, it was more than I could stand: I fell on my knees before her again and began to kiss her feet again, and once again it all ended in a fit of hysterics, the way it had last Tuesday. This happened last night, and in the morning....

In the morning? Oh madman, that morning was today, only a short while ago, so short a while!

Listen and try to understand: when we met at breakfast this morning (after last night's fit, mind you) she quite amazed me by her composure, that's how it was, you see? And I had stayed awake all night, trembling with fear because of what had passed between us the evening before. And there she was suddenly coming straight up to me, stopping in front of me with her hands clasped in entreaty (only a while ago, a while ago!) and saying to me that she was a criminal and knew it, that her crime had tormented her all winter, that it was tormenting her even then ... that she appreciated my magnanimity too well and that "I shall be a faithful wife to you, I shall respect you." I leapt to my feet and embraced her madly. I kissed her; I kissed her face, her lips, like a husband would kiss his wife after a long separation. And why did I ever go out then, I was only away for two hours ... to visa our passports.... Oh God! If I had only come back five minutes earlier, only five minutes.... That crowd at our gate, the stares they gave me.... Oh God!

Lukerya says (oh, I shall never let Lukerya go now, she knows everything, for she was with us all winter, she'll be telling me all about it), Lukerya says that after I had gone out and only some twenty minutes before my return, she had gone into our room to ask her mistress something, I don't remember what, and saw that her icon (that icon of the Holy Virgin) had been taken down from the wall and was standing in front of her on the table, as if the mistress had just been praying. "What is it?" Lukerya had asked. "Nothing, Lukerya,

go. Oh wait, Lukerya," she had said, and coming up to Lukerya had kissed her. "Are you happy, mistress?" Lukerya had asked. "Yes, Lukerya." "Master ought to have come and begged your forgiveness long before this.... Thank the Lord, you've made it up now...." And then she had smiled a very strange smile and said: "Good, Lukerya. Go now, Lukerya." So strange had that smile been that ten minutes later Lukerya had gone back to take another look at her. "There she was standing against the wall, close to the window, her head pressed to her arm propped against the wall, standing there and thinking, she was. She was so lost in thought that she never heard me come in and stand in the door into the other room watching her. It seemed to me that she was smiling, standing there, thinking, and smiling. I took another look at her, turned and tiptoed away, thinking these thoughts the while, when suddenly I heard her opening the window. I hurried back to warn her it was chilly and she might catch cold, when suddenly I saw her getting up on the window-sill, and there she was standing at full height in the open window with her back to me and the icon in her hands. My heart just sank. 'Mistress! Mistress!' I cried. She heard me, made as if to turn to me, but she did not turn. She took a step, clutched the icon to her breast and—jumped out of the window!"

All I remember is that when I walked into the gate the body was still warm. And all of them staring at me. They had all been shouting, but now, suddenly, they fell silent and made way for me—and she, she was there on the ground with the icon. I remember as through a black haze coming up silently and looking down at her for a long time. All stood closely about me saying something to me. Lukerya was there, but I did not see her. She says that she spoke to me. I only remember that tradesman: he kept shouting to me that "she had bled a handful through the mouth, a handful, a handful!" and showed me the blood on the cobble-stones in front of me. I believe I touched the blood with my finger, there was a smear on my finger and I stared at it

(I remember that), while he kept on shouting: "A handful, a handful!"

"What is a handful, what?" I screamed at the top of my voice, they say, raised my arms and rushed at him....

Oh, it's crazy, crazy! Incongruous! Incredible! Impossible!

IV

JUST FIVE MINUTES LATE

Isn't it? Isn't it incredible? Could anyone say that a thing like that was possible? Why did that woman die, what for?

Oh, believe me when I say that I do understand; but why did she have to die? This still remains a question. She was frightened by my love; she had asked herself earnestly, should she accept it or not, but the question had been more than she could endure, and she chose death. I know, I know, it's no use racking my brains: she had given too many promises, she was afraid she could not keep them. That's clear. There are certain considerations here too horrible to contemplate.

Why and what for did she die? The question remains. The question is hammering, hammering at my brain. I would have left her *like that* had she wished it, had she wanted everything to be left *like that*. She did not believe it, that's what it was! No, no, I am lying, it was not that at all. It was simply that with me it had to be in all honesty, to love me in all ways if she loved me at all, and not as she would have loved that shopkeeper. And since she was too chaste and pure to agree to the sort of love demanded by a shopkeeper, she could not bring herself to deceive me. She refused to deceive me with a half-love, or a quarter-love, disguised as true love. She was too honest, that was it. And I was going to implant broadmindedness into her heart once, remember? A queer thought.

I am most curious to know whether or not she respected me. I don't know whether or not she despised me. I do not think she despised me. Strange, isn't it, that it never once oc-

curred to me in all that winter that she despised me! I had been quite convinced of the opposite until the moment she looked at me with that *stern amazement. Stern* it was, indeed. It was then that it suddenly dawned on me that she despised me. I understood it, irrevocably, for ever and ever. Ah, what if she did despise me, despised me for the rest of her life if only she had remained alive! She was moving about and talking only a little while ago. How could she jump out of the window? It's beyond my understanding. And could I have suspected it even five minutes ago? I summoned Lukerya. I'll never let Lukerya go now, not for anything in the world.

Oh, we could have come to an understanding yet. We had only become terribly estranged from one another during the winter, but surely we could have grown into the habit again? Why shouldn't we have been able to become friends and start life anew? I am magnanimous and so was she—there's one link for you. Only a few more words, two days, no more, and she would have understood everything.

The pity of it is that it was sheer accident—an ordinary, cruel and senseless accident. That's the pity of it! Five minutes, I was just five minutes late! Had I come back five minutes earlier, that moment would have flashed past like a cloud, never to enter her head again. And it would have all ended in her understanding everything. But now, there are the empty rooms again, and I all alone. There's the pendulum swinging and clicking, without the least concern or pity for anything. There's no one—that's the trouble.

I keep pacing up and down, up and down. I know, I know without your prompting; you think it funny that I'm putting the blame on an accident and being five minutes late. But it is obvious, you know. Consider this: she did not even leave a note to say that she was taking her own life, the way everybody does. Surely it would have occurred to her that suspicion might fall on Lukerya: "You were alone with her, so you went and pushed her," so to say. Though guiltless, they would have certainly dragged her through the courts, if not for those four people down in the yard who said they saw her, either from their

windows in the wing or from the yard below, standing up on the window-sill with the icon in her hands and then jumping down. But it was also sheer chance, you know, those people being there and seeing it. No, it was nothing but a moment, an unaccountable moment. Impulse and imagination! What if she has been sitting there and praying? It does not necessarily mean a prayer before death. The whole moment may have lasted no more than ten minutes; she may have formed the resolve within that very minute when she stood against the wall, resting her head on her arm and smiling. The notion had flashed across her mind, leaving it in a whirl, and she had not been able to withstand it.

It was a misunderstanding: that's obvious, whatever you say. I was not beyond living with. Could it have been anaemia, I wonder? Perhaps it was just her anaemia, a sapping of vitality? That winter had worn her out, that's what it was....

I came too late! ! !

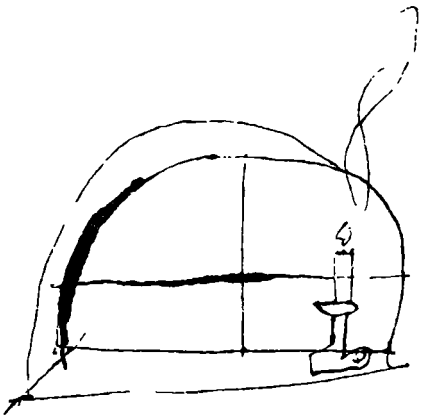
How small and thin she looks in her coffin, how sharp her nose! Her eye-lashes are like tiny arrows on her cheeks. And the way she fell—nothing broken, nothing smashed. Only that one "handful of blood." A dessert spoon, that is. Internal haemorrhage. A queer thought: supposing she did not have to be buried? Because if they take her away... then... oh no, it's almost impossible to take her away. I do realize, of course, that they'll have to take her away, I am neither mad nor raving; on the contrary, my reason has never before been so lucid—but how can it be: no one in the house again; again those two rooms, and I alone in my pawnshop! I'm raving, raving, this is raving indeed! I made her suffer too much, that's what it was.

What do I care for your laws now? What use have I for your customs, your morals, your world, your country, your creed? Let your judge sit in judgement over me, let them take me to court, your public court, and I shall say that I defy everything. The judge will shout: "I order silence, Officer!" And I shall shout back: "What power have you now to make me obey? Why did bigoted ignorance wreck what was dearest

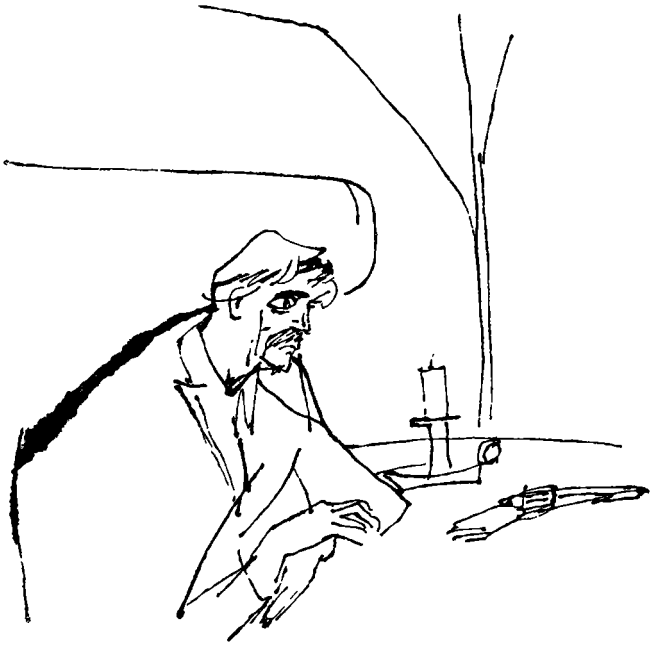
to me? What good will your laws do me now? I am withdrawing from you all." Oh, I don't care.

She's blind, blind! She's dead, she cannot hear. You do not know that I would have built a paradise for you to dwell in. For I had a paradise in my heart, and I would have lavished it on you. Granted you would not have given me your love—never mind, what of it? Everything would have remained *like that*, it would have gone on being *like that*. You would have spoken to me as to a friend; we would have delighted in our talks and laughed together, looking happily into each other's eyes, that's all. And that's how it would be. And even if you came to love another, why—never mind, never mind! You would have walked along with him and smiled, while I would have looked at you from across the street.... Oh, never mind anything, if only she would open her eyes just once! For one single moment, just one! If she would only look at me the way she had done earlier today when she stood before me and swore to be a faithful wife to me! Oh, in that single glance she would have understood everything.

Soullessness! Oh, nature! People are alone on this planet, that's the trouble. "Is there a living soul on this field?" cries the hero of Russian legend. Though no legendary hero, I make the same call, but no one responds. They say the sun gives life to the universe. But the sun rises and—look—isn't it dead? Everything is dead, the dead lie everywhere. Just solitary people, and all about—silence. That's the kind of world we live in. "People, love one another"—who said that? Whose commandment is it? The pendulum is clicking unfeelingly, horridly. It's two in the morning. Her shoes are standing beside her bed, as though waiting for her.... Listen, I mean it, they'll take her away tomorrow, but what about me?



A FUNNY MAN'S DREAM



A FANTASY

I

I am a funny man. They call me a madman now. It would have been a promotion for me had I not appeared as funny to them as ever. But I no longer mind—they are all dear to me now, even when they are laughing at me, something endears them to me particularly then. I would laugh with them —not at myself, that is, but because I love them—I would laugh if I did not feel so sad looking at them. What saddens me is that they do not know the truth, and I do. Oh, how

hard it is to be the only one to know the truth! But they will not understand this. No, they will not.

It used to hurt me very much that I seemed funny. I did not seem it, I was. I have always been funny and I think I've known it since the day I was born. I believe I realized it when I was seven, I went to school and then to the university, but what of it? The more I studied the more I came to realize that I was funny. And so, as far as I was concerned, the ultimate meaning of science was to prove and explain to me, the more I probed it, that I was indeed funny. Life taught me the same thing. With every year my awareness of how funny I was in every respect grew and developed. I was laughed at by everyone and all the time. But none of them knew or guessed that of all the people in the world I knew best how funny I was, and it was the fact that they did not know this that hurt me most of all, but the fault was entirely mine: I was always so proud that I would never admit this knowledge to anyone. My pride swelled in me with the years, and had I allowed myself to admit to anyone that I was funny, I believe I would have blown my brains out that same night. Oh, the torment I went through in my adolescence for fear that I would weaken and make the admission to my friends! As I grew to manhood I learned more and more of this awful shortcoming of mine with every year, but in spite of this I took it a little more calmly for some reason. I repeat—for some reason, because to this day I fail to give it a clear definition. Perhaps it was because of that hopeless sadness that was mounting in my soul about something that was infinitely greater than myself: this something was a mounting conviction that *nothing mattered.* I had begun to suspect this long ago, but positive conviction came to me all at once, one day last year. I suddenly knew that *I would not have cared* if the world existed at all or if there was nothing anywhere. I began to know and feel with all my being that *there has been nothing* since I have been there. At first I kept thinking that there must have been a great deal before, but then I realized that there had not been anything before either, and that it

only seemed so for some reason. Gradually, I became convinced that there would never be anything at all. It was then I suddenly ceased minding people and no longer noticed them at all. It was quite true, even in the merest trifles: for instance, I would walk into people as I went along the street. Not that I was lost in thought either, for what was there to think about, I had given up thinking altogether then: I did not care. Neither did I solve any problems; no, not a single one, and yet there was a host of them. But *I did not care* now, and all the problems receded into the background.

And it was much later that I learned the Truth. It was in November, the third of November to be exact, that I learned the Truth, and since then I remember every moment of my life. It happened on a gloomy night, the gloomiest night that could ever be. I was walking home, the time being after ten, and I remember thinking that no hour could be gloomier. It was so even physically. It had been raining all day, and it was the coldest and gloomiest rain, even an ominous rain, I remember, obviously hostile to people, and suddenly after ten it stopped and a horrible dampness set in, which was colder and damper than during the rain, and steam rose from everything, from every cobble-stone, from every alleyway if you peered into his deepest and darkest recesses. I suddenly fancied that if all the gas-lights were to go out it would be more cheerful, for gas-light, showing up all this, made one feel even sadder. I had hardly eaten anything that day, and since late afternoon I had been at an engineer's I knew, with two other friends of his. I said nothing all evening and I believe I bored them. They were discussing something exciting and actually lost their tempers over it. They did not care, I could see, but lost their tempers just like that. I went and blurted it out to them: "Gentlemen," I said, "you don't really care, you know." They took no offence, they just laughed at me. That was because there was no sting in my remark, I simply made it because I did not care. They saw that I did not care and it made them laugh.

When, walking home, I thought of the gas-light, I glanced up at the sky. The sky was terribly dark, but I could clearly make out the ragged clouds and the fathomless black pits between them. Suddenly I noticed a tiny star twinkling in one of those pits and I stopped to stare at it. That was because the tiny star gave me an idea: I made up my mind to kill myself that night. I had made up my mind to do it fully two months before, and poor though I am I had bought a splendid revolver and had loaded it that same day. Two months had already passed, however, and it was still lying in my desk drawer; my feeling of not caring had been so strong then that I wanted to choose a moment when it would be a little less so to do it in, why—I do not know. And so every night, for two months, I had gone home with the thought of killing myself. I was watching for the right moment. And now this star gave me the idea, and I made up my mind that *it had to be* that night. I do not know why the tiny star gave me the idea.

There I stood staring at the sky when suddenly the little girl clutched at my arm. The street was already deserted and there was hardly a soul about. A droshky was standing some way off with the driver dozing in it. The girl must have been about eight. All she wore in this cold was a poor cotton frock and a kerchief, she was drenched through, but I particularly noticed her sodden, broken shoes. I remember them even now. They struck me particularly. She suddenly began to tug at my elbow and cry. She was not weeping, but was crying out snatches of words which she could not articulate properly because she was shivering all over as in a fever. Something had frightened her, and she called out desperately: "My mummy, my mummy!" I half-turned towards her but said not a word and continued on my way, while she kept running after me, tugging at my coat, and her voice rang with that peculiar sound which in badly frightened children means despair. I know that sound. Though her words were incoherent, I understood that her mother lay dying somewhere, or perhaps it was some other disaster that had befallen them, and she had rushed out

into the street to find someone or something to help her mother. But I did not go with her; on the contrary, it suddenly occurred to me to drive her away. I told her to go and look for a policeman. But she folded her hands in entreaty and, sobbing and panting, ran along at my side and would not leave me alone. It was then I stamped my feet at her and shouted. All she cried was: "Sir, oh sir!" but, abandoning me abruptly, she darted across the street: another passer-by appeared there and it was to him she must have run from me.

I climbed my five flights of stairs. I live in a lodging house. My room is wretched and small, with just one attic window in it, a semicircular one. The furniture consists of an oilcloth-covered sofa, two chairs, a table with my books on it, and an armchair, a very, very old one but a Voltaire armchair for all that. I sat down, lighted my candle, and gave myself up to thought. The room next door was a real Bedlam. It has been going on since the day before yesterday. The man who lives there is a discharged captain and he was having guests, about six of them—castaways on the sea of life—drinking vodka and playing *stoss* with an old deck of cards. There had been a fight the night before, and I know that two of them had torn at one another's hair for quite a long time. The landlady wanted to put in a complaint against them, but she is terribly afraid of the captain. The only other lodger is a thin little lady, an officer's wife, a newcomer to the town with three small children, who have all been ill since they came here. The lady and the children live in deadly fear of the captain, they spend their nights shaking with fear and praying, and as for the youngest baby, it was even frightened into a fit once. The captain, I know for a fact, sometimes accosts people on the Nevsky and begs alms. He won't be given a post anywhere, but strangely (this is why I am telling all this), in all the months he has been staying with us, he never once roused any resentment in me. I naturally shunned his company from the outset, but then he too thought me a bore the very first time we met, and no matter how loudly they shout in their room or how many they are—I never care. I sit up all night and,

honestly, I never even hear them, so utterly do I forget them. I cannot sleep, you know; it has been like that for a year now. I spend the night sitting in my armchair and doing nothing. I only read in the daytime. I just sit there, without even thinking. My thoughts are vague and stray, and I let them wander. My candle burns down every night. And so, I calmly settled down in my chair, took out my revolver and placed it on the table before me. I remember asking myself as I put it down: "Are you sure?" and answering very firmly: "I *am* sure." That is, I would kill myself. I knew that I would definitely kill myself that night, but how much longer I would sit thus at the table before I did it I did not know. And I would have certainly killed myself if it had not been for that little girl.

II

You see how it was: though I did not care, I was still sensitive to pain, for instance. If someone struck me I would feel the pain. Mentally it was exactly the same: if something very pathetic happened I would feel pity, just as I would have felt pity in the days before I had ceased caring for anything in the world. And I did feel pity earlier that night: surely, I should have helped a child in distress? Why had I not helped her then? Because of a thought that had occurred to me; when she was tugging at my coat and crying out, a problem suddenly confronted me and I was unable to solve it. It was an idle problem but it had angered me. I got angry because, having definitely decided to commit suicide that very night, I ought to have cared less than ever for anything in the world. Then why had I suddenly felt that I did care and was sorry for the little girl? I remember I was frightfully sorry for her, my pity was strangely poignant and incongruous in my position. I really cannot give a better description of that fleeting feeling of mine, but it remained with me even after I had reached my room and had seated myself in my chair,

and it vexed me more than anything else had done for a long time. One argument followed another. It was perfectly clear to me that if I was a man and not yet a nought, and had not yet become a nought, I was therefore alive and, consequently, able to suffer, resent, and feel shame for my actions. Very well. But if I was going to kill myself in a couple of hours from then, why should I be concerned with the girl and what did I care for shame or anything else in the world? I would become a nought, an absolute nought. And could it be that my ability to feel pity for the girl and shame for my vile action was not in the least affected by the certainty that I would soon become *completely* non-existent, and therefore nothing would exist. Why, the reason I had stamped my feet and shouted so brutally at the poor child was to assert that: "Far from feeling pity, I could even afford to do something inhumanly vile now, because two hours hence all would fade away." Do you believe me when I say that this was the reason why I had shouted? I am almost positive now that it was that. It had seemed clear to me that life and the world were from then on dependent on me, as it were. I should even say that the world seemed specially made for me alone: if I killed myself the world would be no more, at least as far as I was concerned. To say nothing of the possibility that there would really be nothing for anyone after I was gone, and the moment my consciousness dimmed the whole world, being a mere attribute of my consciousness, would instantly dim too, fade like a mirage and be no more, for it may be that all this world of ours and all these people are merely part of myself, are just myself. I remember that as I sat there and reasoned, I gave an entirely different twist to all these new problems that were thronging my mind, and conceived some perfectly new ideas. For instance, a strange notion like this occurred to me: supposing I had once lived on the moon or Mars and had there committed the foulest and scurviest of deeds imaginable, for which I had been made to suffer all the scorn and dishonour conceivable in nothing less than in a dream, in a nightmare, and supposing I later found myself on the earth, with

the crime committed on that other planet alive in my consciousness and, besides, knowing there was no return for me, ever, under any circumstances—would *I have cared* or not as I gazed at the moon from this earth? Would I have felt shame for that deed or not? All these questions were idle and superfluous since the revolver was already lying in front of me and I knew with all my being that *it* was bound to happen, and yet the questions excited me and roused me to a frenzy. I no longer seemed able to die before I had solved something first. In short, that little girl saved my life because the unsolved questions put off the act. Meanwhile, the noise at the captain's began to subside too: they had finished their game and were now settling down to sleep, grumbling, and sleepily rounding off their mutual abuse. It was then that I suddenly fell asleep in my chair in front of the table, a thing that never happened to me before. I dropped off without knowing it at all. Dreams, we all know, are extremely queer things: one will be appallingly vivid, with the greatest imaginable precision in every minutely finished detail, while another will take you through time and space so swiftly that you hardly notice the flight. Dreams, I believe, are directed by desire, not reason, by the heart and not the mind, and yet what fantastic tricks my reason sometimes plays on me in dreams! The things that happen to my reason in sleep are quite incredible. To give an instance: my brother has been dead these five years. I dream of him sometimes: he takes an active interest in my affairs, we are very fond of one another, yet all through my dream I know perfectly well that my brother has long been dead and buried. Why does it not surprise me then that though dead he is still there beside me, worrying about my affairs? Why does my reason reconcile itself to all this so willingly? But enough. To return to my dream. Yes, my dream of November the 3rd. They all tease me now that, after all, it was nothing but a dream. But surely it makes no difference whether it was a dream or not since it did reveal the Truth to me? Because if you have come to know it once and to see it, you will know it is the Truth and that there is not, there cannot

be any other, whether you are dreaming or living. Very well, it was a dream—let it be a dream, but the fact remains that I was going to snuff out the life which you all extol so, whereas my dream, my dream—oh, my dream revealed to me another life, a life revived, magnificent and potent.

Listen then.

III

I said that I fell asleep without knowing it and even continuing with my musings on the same matters when no longer awake, as it were. A dream came to me that I picked up my revolver and, still keeping my chair, pressed it to my heart—my heart and not my head, whereas I had definitely decided to shoot myself through the head, and the right temple it had to be. With the revolver pressed to my heart I waited a moment or two, and suddenly my candle, the table and the wall in front of me all began to rock and sway. I quickly pulled the trigger.

In dreams you sometimes fall from a great height or you are stabbed or beaten, but you never feel the pain unless you jerk and actually hurt yourself against the bedpost; you do feel the pain then, and it is almost certain to wake you up. It was the same in my dream: I felt no pain but with the sound of the report my whole being seemed to be shaken up and suddenly everything was extinguished and there was a horrible blackness all around me. I seemed to have gone blind and mute, I was lying on something very hard, stretched out on my back, seeing nothing and unable to make the slightest movement. Voices shouted and feet tramped all about me; there was the captain's low rumble and the landlady's shrill screech—and suddenly there was a blank again, and now they were carrying me in a coffin with the lid nailed down. I could feel the coffin swaying and I was reflecting upon it, when all of a sudden the thought struck me for the first time: I was dead, quite dead. I knew it without a doubt, I could neither see nor move, and yet I could feel and reason. But soon I reconciled myself to

this and, as usual in dreams, accepted the fact without demur.

And now they were piling earth over my grave. Everyone left, I was alone, utterly alone. I did not stir. Whenever I used to imagine what it would be like to be buried, I generally associated but one sensation with the grave: the feeling of damp and cold. And now too I felt very cold, the tips of my toes were the worst, and that was all the sensation I had.

I lay there and, strangely, expected nothing, resigning myself to the fact that the dead have nothing to expect. But it was damp. I do not know how long I lay there—whether it was an hour, or a day, or many days. All of a sudden a drop of water, which had seeped through the lid of the coffin, fell on my left closed eye; a minute later there was another drop, a minute more and there was a third, and so on, drops falling at regular one-minute intervals. Indignation mounted in my heart, and suddenly I felt a physical pain in it. "It's my wound," I thought. "My shot, the bullet's there. . . ." And the water kept dripping, a drop a minute, straight down on my closed eye. I suddenly invoked, not with my voice for I lay inert, but with the whole of my being, the Ruler of all that was befalling me:

"Whoever Thou may be, but if Thou art and if there does exist any wisdom greater than the present, suffer it to descend upon this too. But if Thou art imposing vengeance upon me for my unwise suicide, with all the ugliness and incongruity of the life to come, then know Thee that no tortures I could ever be made to suffer could compare with the contempt I shall always feel in silence, be it through millions of years of martyrdom!"

I invoked and fell silent. Deep silence reigned for almost a full minute, and one more drop fell, but I knew with infinite and profound faith, that all would be different now. And suddenly my grave was rent open. That is, I do not know if it was dug open, but a dark and strange being picked me up and bore me away into space. I suddenly recovered sight. It was deep night, and never, never had there been such

darkness yet! We were flying through space, the earth was already far behind us. I asked the one that bore me nothing at all, I waited, I was proud. I made myself believe I was not afraid, and my breath caught with admiration at the thought that I was not afraid. I do not remember how long we flew nor can I venture a guess: everything was happening the way it usually happens in dreams when you leap over space and time, over all laws of life and reason, and only pause where your heart's desire bids you pause. I remember I suddenly saw a tiny star in the darkness. "Is it Sirius?" I could not hold back the question, although I did not want to ask anything at all. "No, that is the star you saw between the clouds on your way home," replied the one that bore me away. I knew the being was somewhat human in likeness. Strangely enough, I had no love for that being, I rather felt a deep aversion for it. I had expected complete non-existence and with that thought I had shot myself. And now I was in the hands of a being, not a human being of course, but a being nonetheless that *was*, that existed. "It just shows that there is life hereafter," I thought with the peculiar flippancy of dreams, but the essence of my spirit remained with me intact. "If I must *be* again," I thought, "and again live by someone's inescapable will, I do not want to be beaten and humiliated!" "You know that I am afraid of you, and for this you despise me," I suddenly said, unable to hold back my cringing words which held an admission, and feeling the pin-prick of humiliation in my heart. There was no reply, but all at once I knew that I was not being despised; I was not being laughed at nor even pitied; I knew that our flight through space had a purpose, mysterious and strange, concerning me alone. Fear mounted in my heart. Something was being mutely but painfully transmitted to me by my silent companion, piercing me through as it were. We flew through dark and unfamiliar space. I no longer saw the constellations my eyes were used to seeing. I knew that there were certain stars in the vastness of the sky whose rays took thousands and millions of years to reach the earth. Perhaps we were already

flying through those regions. I waited for I knew not what, my tormented heart gripped with a terrible anguish. And suddenly I was shaken with a feeling that was familiar and so stirring: I saw our sun! I knew it could not be *our* sun which had begotten *our* earth, and also that we were infinitely far away from our sun, but my whole being told me that this was a sun exactly like our own, a duplicate of it, its twin. My soul rang with sweet and stirring ecstasy: this familiar source of light, the same light that had given me life, evoked an echo in my heart and resurrected it, and for the first time since my burial I sensed life, the same life as before.

"But if this is the sun, if this is a sun exactly like ours, then where is the earth?" I cried. And my companion pointed to a star sparkling in the darkness like emerald. We were flying straight towards it.

"Are such duplications really possible in the universe, is this really the law of nature? And if that star is an earth, can it be an earth like ours . . . exactly like ours, wretched and poor but dear and ever beloved, inspiring even in its most ungrateful children a love as poignant for it as our own earth inspires?" I cried out, trembling with rapturous, boundless love for that dear, old earth I had deserted. A vision of the poor little girl I had hurt flashed past me.

"You shall see everything," my companion said, and I sensed a peculiar sorrow in his words. But now we were quickly nearing the planet. It grew as we approached, I could already distinguish the oceans, the outline of Europe, and suddenly my heart was ablaze with a great and holy jealousy. "How can such a duplication be and what for? I do love and can love only the earth I have left behind, the earth bespattered with my blood when I in my ingratitude snuffed out my life with a shot through the heart. But I never, never ceased to love that earth, and the night I parted with it I think I loved it even more poignantly than ever before. Does this new earth hold suffering? On our earth we can only love truly by suffering and only through suffering. We can love in no other way and know no other love. I must have suffering, if I would love.

I want, I long this instant to kiss that one and only earth I left behind me, and weep, and I do not want, I defy, life on any other!"

But my companion had already left me. I do not know how it came about but suddenly I found myself upon this other earth in the bright sunlight of a day as lovely as paradise. I believe I was on one of those islands which on our earth comprise the Greek Archipelago, or it may have been on the mainland somewhere, on the shore which the Archipelago adjoins. Everything was exactly the same as on our earth, but it all seemed to wear the splendour of a holiday, and shone with the glory of a great and holy triumph at last attained. A gentle emerald-green sea softly lapped the shores and caressed them with a love that was undisguised, visible, and almost conscious. Tall and beautiful trees stood in flowering splendour, while their countless little leaves welcomed me (I'm certain of it) with their gentle and soothing rustling, and they seemed to be murmuring words of love to me. The meadow was ablaze with bright, fragrant flowers. Birds fluttered above in flocks and unafraid of me alighted on my shoulders and hands and happily beat me with their sweet, tremulous wings. And finally I saw and came to know the people of this joyous land. They came to me themselves, they surrounded me and kissed me. Children of the sun, of their own sun—oh how beautiful they were! I have never seen such beauty in man on our planet. Only in our youngest children could one, perhaps, detect a distant and very faint reflection of this beauty. The eyes of these happy people shone with a clear light. Their faces were aglow with wisdom and intelligence matured into serenity, but their expression was gay; their words and voices rang with child-like joy. Oh, I instantly understood all, all, the moment I looked into their faces! This was an earth undefiled by sin, inhabited by people who had not sinned; they dwelt in a Garden of Eden just like the one in which our ancestors, so the legends of all mankind say, had once dwelt before they knew sin, with the only difference that the whole of this earth was one great Garden of Eden. These people, laughing

happily, clung to me and caressed me; they led me away and every one of them showed eagerness to comfort me. They did not question me about anything at all, they seemed to know all, and were anxious to drive the suffering from my face.

IV

I repeat, you see: let it be nothing but a dream. But the sensation of being loved by those innocent and beautiful people will remain with me for ever, and even now I can feel their love pouring down on me from up there. I have seen them with my own eyes, have known them and been convinced; I have loved them and, afterwards, suffered for them. Oh, I realized from the first that I should never be able to understand them at all in many things; for instance, it appeared inexplicable to me, a modern Russian progressive and wretched citizen of St. Petersburg, that, knowing so much, they did not possess our science. But I soon realized that their knowledge was enriched and stimulated by other penetrations than ours, and that their aspirations were also quite different from ours. They desired nothing and were content, they did not strive to know life the way we strive to probe its depths, because their life was consummate. Their knowledge was finer and more profound than our science, for our science attempts to explain the meaning of life. Science itself strives to fathom it in order to teach others how to live; while *they* knew how to live without the help of science, I saw it but I could not understand this knowledge of theirs. They showed their trees to me, and I failed to appreciate the depth of the love with which they gazed at them: it was as if they were speaking to beings like themselves. And do you know, I may not be wrong if I tell you that they did speak to them. Yes, they had found a common tongue and I am convinced the trees understood them. This was the way they treated all Nature—the beasts who lived in peace with them, never attacking them and loving them, conquered by the people's own love for them. They

pointed out the stars to me and spoke to me about them, saying things I could not understand, but I am positive they had some tie with those heavenly bodies, a living tie, not spiritual alone. Oh no, these people did not insist that I should understand them, they loved me as it was, but then I knew that they, too, would never understand me and so hardly spoke to them about our earth. I only kissed the earth they lived on and without words adored them, and they saw it and permitted themselves to be adored, unashamed of my adoration, for their own love was great. They felt no pang for me when, moved to tears, I sometimes kissed their feet, joyfully certain in my heart of the infinite love with which they would reciprocate my emotion. I sometimes asked myself in bewilderment: how was it that they never insulted one like me, never roused one like me to feelings of jealousy or envy? I asked myself again and again, how did I, a braggart and a liar, refrain from telling them of all my acquired knowledge of which they naturally had no inkling, from wishing to impress them with it, if only because I loved them? They were gay and frolicsome like children. They wandered about their beautiful groves and forests, singing their beautiful songs, eating light food—the fruit of their trees, the honey of their woods, and the milk of the beasts devoted to them. They toiled but little to procure their food and clothing. They loved and begot children, but never did I detect any signs of that *cruel* sensuality in them, which almost everyone falls victim to on our earth, one and all, and which serves as the sole source of almost all the sins of mankind on our earth. They welcomed the children born to them as new participants in their bliss. There were no quarrels or jealousy among them, and they did not even understand the meaning of these words. Their children were the children of all of them, for they formed one family. Sickness was very rare, though there was death; but their old people died peacefully; they seemed to fall asleep, blessing and smiling upon the ones they were taking leave of, themselves carrying away the clear smiles of those surrounding them in farewell. I saw no grief or tears then, only love multiplied as

it were to ecstasy, but an ecstasy that was serene, contemplative and consummate. It was as if they kept in touch with their dead even after their death, and that their earthly ties were unsevered by death. They hardly understood me when I asked them if they believed in life eternal, for evidently their faith in it was so implicit it presented no problem to them. They had no churches, but they had a vital, close and constant association with the Sum of the universe; they had no creed, but instead they had the unshakable knowledge that, when their earthly bliss was consummated to the ultimate extent of its earthly nature, all of them—the living and the dead—would come into even closer contact with the Sum of the universe. They looked forward to that day with eagerness but with no impatience or morbid longing. It seemed rather that they were already carrying a foretaste of it in their hearts, sharing it with one another. Before going to sleep at night they would sing, their voices blending in true and blissful harmony. Their songs spoke of all that the passing day had granted them to feel, they hallowed it and bid it farewell. They hallowed nature, earth, sea and woods. They were fond of making up songs about one another, praising one another like children; they were the simplest of songs, but they came from the heart and stirred other hearts. Why songs alone? Their very lives were spent admiring one another. It was a sort of infatuation with one another, universal and complete. However, some of their other songs, solemn and exultant, I hardly understood at all. While understanding the words, I could never grasp their full meaning. It remained beyond my intelligence, as it were, yet instinctively my heart grew more and more responsive to it. I often told them that I had foreglimpsed this long, long ago; that all this happiness and glory had stirred a chord of anguished longing in me while on our own planet, mounting at times to unbearable sorrow; that I had foreglimpsed all of them and their glory in the dreams of my heart and the visions of my mind; that often I could not watch the sun go down on our earth without tears.... That my hatred for the people on our earth always held

sadness: why could I not hate them without loving them, why could I not help forgiving them, and why was there sadness in my love for them; why could I not love them without hating them? They listened to me, and I saw that they could not comprehend what I was telling them, but I was not sorry I had told them for I knew that they appreciated to the full the great yearning I felt for the ones I had left behind. When they turned their dear, loving gaze on me, when I felt that with them my heart became as innocent and truthful as theirs, it sufficed me, and I was not sorry I did not understand them. I was speechless with the fulness of life, and could only worship them in silence.

Oh, everyone laughs in my face now and says that one could never dream of all those details I am narrating now, that in my dream I could have seen and felt nothing but a mere sensation of something conceived by my own heart in delirium, and as for the details I must have made them up on awakening. And when I admitted to them that it may really have been so—oh Lord, the way they laughed in my face, the fun they had at my expense! Yes, of course, I was overcome by the mere sensation of my dream, and that alone survived in my wounded, bleeding heart: as for the actual images and shapes, that is, those I had really seen in my dream, they were so perfect in their harmony, charm and beauty and were so true, that our feeble words naturally failed me to describe them on awakening, and they were bound to become blurred in my mind. Therefore, I may indeed have been compelled to make up the details afterwards though unconsciously, distorting them of course, especially since I was so impatient and eager to give them some sort of expression. But then how could I doubt the truth of my words? It was a thousand times better perhaps, brighter and happier than I am telling it. Granted it was a dream, but all of this had been, it had to be. Do you know, I shall tell you a secret: it may not have been a dream at all! Because something happened next, something so horribly true that it could never come to one even in a dream. Granted, my heart conceived that dream,

but could my heart alone have been able to conceive that appalling reality which befell me next? How could I have made it up by myself, how could my heart prompt that dream? Surely my shallow heart and my whimsical, wretched mind could not have been elevated to such revelations of the truth? Oh, judge for yourselves: I have concealed it until now, but now I shall disclose this truth as well. The fact is that I... I corrupted them all!

V

Yes, yes, it ended in my corrupting them all! I do not know how it could have happened, but I remember perfectly that it did. My dream sped across thousands of years and left with me only an impression of it as a whole. I only know that it was I who caused their downfall. Like a malignant trichina, an atom of the plague afflicting whole kingdoms, so I spread contamination through all that happy earth, sinless before I came to it. They learned to lie and came to love lying, appreciating the beauty of lies. Oh, it may have begun quite *innocently*, with laughter, coquetry, playful love, or it really may have been the atom of lying seeping into their hearts and appealing to them. Soon after, sensuality was born, sensuality conceived jealousy, and jealousy conceived cruelty.... Oh, I don't know, I can't remember, but soon, very soon blood was spilt for the first time: they were astounded and horrified, and began to separate and go different ways. They formed unions, but the unions were inimical to one another. Reproaches and recriminations began. They came to know shame and made a virtue of it. They learned the meaning of honour, and each union flew its own colours. They became cruel to their beasts who retreated from them into the forests and turned hostile. A struggle ensued for division, for sovereignty, for personal prominence, for thine and mine. They now spoke different tongues. They tasted of sorrow and came to love sorrow, they thirsted for sufferings and said that only through suffering could Truth be attained. And then

science was introduced. When they grew evil, they began to talk of fraternity and humanity and understood these precepts. When they grew criminal they invented the idea of justice and in order to maintain it prescribed for themselves voluminous codes of law, and to add security to these codes they erected a guillotine. They had but a vague memory of what they had lost, and even refused to believe that once they had been innocent and happy. The very thought that they could have once been so happy made them laugh, and they called it a dream. They could not even envisage it in images and shapes, but strangely and miraculously, though they had lost all faith in their former happiness calling it a fairy-tale, they so wanted to become innocent and happy again that they succumbed to their heartfelt wish like children and, deifying this wish, they put up numerous temples and began to pray to their own idea, or rather their "wish," knowing full well that it could never come true or be granted to them, but adoring and worshipping it in tears none the less. And yet, if it had been possible to restore them to the innocent and happy realm they had lost, or if someone could have given them a glimpse of it again and asked them whether they would like to come back to it, they would have probably refused. They told me: "Let us be deceitful, evil and unjust, but we *know* it, we weep over it, and torment ourselves for it, and the punishment we inflict upon ourselves is even harsher perhaps than that which will be meted out to us by the merciful Judge who will sit in judgement over us and whose name we do not know. We possess science, and through it we shall seek and find the Truth once again, and this time we shall apprehend it consciously. Knowledge is superior to feeling, consciousness of life is superior to life. Science will give us wisdom, wisdom will determine the laws, and knowledge of the laws of happiness is superior to happiness." This is what they said to me, and after saying it each one loved himself above all others, nor could he have done differently. Each one protected his ego so jealously, that he directed all his strivings towards humiliating and belittling the ego of others: and this became his life work.

Next came slavery, there was voluntary slavery as well: the weak willingly submitted to the strong only so they should help them to crush those even weaker than themselves. There were the righteous who came to these people and in tears spoke to them of their arrogance, of their loss of all sense of measure and harmony, all shame. But the righteous were mocked and stoned. Holy blood dyed the thresholds of temples. Men appeared in their stead who began to contrive how best to unite everyone once again but in such a manner that each should continue loving himself above all others and yet should not stand in the others' way, so that all could once more live together in apparently good agreement. Great wars were fought because of this idea. Though engaged in warfare, the fighters firmly believed that science, wisdom and the instinct of self-preservation would eventually force mankind to unite into a society that was concordant and sensible, and in the meantime, to speed matters up, the "wise" tried to exterminate the unbelievers in their idea and the "unwise" as quickly as possible so they should not impede the idea's triumph. But the instinct of self-preservation soon began to weaken, and men pandering to their arrogance or sensuality demanded outright: all or nothing. To acquire all they resorted to crime and if that failed—to suicide. Religions were next introduced with a cult of non-existence and self-destruction for the sake of eternal peace in nonentity. The people were at last worn out with their senseless toil, and suffering shadowed their faces; and they proclaimed that suffering was beauty, for in suffering alone lay thought. They extolled suffering in their songs. I walked among them, wringing my hands and weeping over them; my love for them was even greater perhaps than before when their faces showed no suffering and they were innocent and so beautiful. I came to love the earth defiled by them even more than I did when it was a paradise, solely because grief had come to it. Alas, I have always loved sorrow and grief, but for my own self, for myself alone, while over them I wept in pity. I held my arms out to them in despair, accusing, cursing and despising myself. I told them that I had done

it all, I alone; that it was I who brought them this germ of corruption, iniquity and deceit. I implored them to crucify me, I taught them how to make the cross. I could not, I had not the strength to kill myself, but I wanted to suffer at their hands, I longed for suffering, longed for my blood to be drained-drop by drop in these sufferings. But they just laughed at me and finally came to regard me as a saintly fool. They made excuses for me, saying that they had received only what they had been asking for, and that all they had now could not have been otherwise. At last they declared that I was becoming a danger to them, and that they would lock me up in the madhouse if I did not keep quiet. At this, sorrow gripped my heart so fiercely that I could not breathe, I felt that I was dying, and then . . . that was when I woke up.

It was already day, or rather day had not yet dawned but it was after five. I awoke in my armchair; my candle had burnt out, the captain's room was locked in sleep, and a silence unusual for our house reigned about me. I instantly leapt to my feet in amazement: nothing even remotely like this had ever happened to me before, not in any of the trifling details that did not really matter such as falling asleep in my chair, for instance. And suddenly, as I stood there recovering my senses, I saw my revolver lying all ready and loaded before me. With a quick thrust I pushed it away. No, give me life now, life! I raised my arms and invoked the eternal Truth, or rather wept, for all my being was roused to exultation, immeasurable exultation. Yes, I wanted to live and spread the word. My resolution to preach came on the instant, to preach now and for ever, of course. I shall preach, I must preach—what? Truth. For I have seen it, seen it with my own eyes, seen it in all its glory.

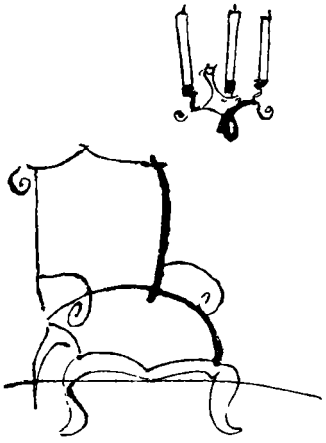
And so I have been spreading the word ever since. What is more, the ones who laugh at me are dearer to me now than all the others. Why it is so I do not know nor can explain, but let it be so. They say that I am floundering already, that is, if

I am floundering so badly now how do I expect to go on? It's perfectly true, I am floundering and it may become even worse as I go on. There is no doubt that I will indeed flounder and lose my way more than once before I learn how best to preach, that is with what words and by what deeds, for it is a very difficult mission. It's all as clear as day to me even now, you know; but, listen, who of us does not flounder? And yet everyone is going towards the same thing, at least all strive for the same thing, all—from the wise man to the meanest wretch—only all follow different paths. It's an old truth, but here's something new: I cannot flounder too badly, you know. Because I have seen the Truth, I have seen it and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing their ability to dwell on this earth. I cannot and will not believe that evil is man's natural state. And yet it's just this conviction of mine that makes them all laugh at me. How could I help believing it, though: I have seen the Truth, it was not a figment of my imagination or my mind, I have seen it, seen it, and its *living image* has taken hold of my soul for ever. I have seen it in such consummate wholeness that I refuse to believe that it cannot live among men. And so, how could I lose my way? I shall stray once or twice of course, I shall perhaps even use the words of others sometimes, but not for long: the living image of what I have seen will remain with me always, it will always correct me and put me straight. I am full of vigour and strength. I shall go and preach, be it for a thousand years. Do you know, I first wanted to conceal the fact that I had corrupted them all, but that would have been a mistake —a mistake already, you see. Truth whispered in my ear that I was *lying*, Truth saved me and showed me the way. But I do not know how to build a paradise on earth, for I do not know how to put it in words. I lost the words on awakening. At least all the most important words, the most essential. Never mind; I shall go on my way and preach tirelessly, because I have seen it with my own eyes, even though I cannot describe what I have seen. That is something the mockers fail to understand. They say: "It was just a dream, ravings and hal-

lucinations." Oh dear! Is that clever? And they are so proud of themselves, too. A dream, they say. But what is a dream? Isn't our life a dream? I shall go further: let it never, never come true, let paradise never be (after all, I do realise that!) I shall anyway go and spread the word. And yet it could be done so simply: in a single day, in a *single hour* everything would be settled! One should love others as one loves oneself, that is the main thing, that is all, nothing else, absolutely nothing else is needed, and then one would instantly know how to go about it. It's nothing but an old truth, repeated and read billions of times, and yet it has not taken root. "Consciousness of life is superior to life, knowledge of the laws of happiness is superior to happiness"—this is what we must fight against. And I shall. If only everyone wanted it, it could be all done at once.

* * *

As for that little girl, I have found her . . . I shall go! Yes, I shall go!



STEPANCHIKOVO AND ITS INHABITANTS

FROM NOTES BY AN UNKNOWN

PART ONE

I

INTRODUCTION

My uncle, Colonel Rostanev, Yegor Ilyich, on retiring moved to Stepanchikovo, an estate he had inherited, and settled down to the life of a country gentleman as if he had never been anything else and had never left his estate. There are people who are invariably pleased with everything and grow used to absolutely everything; precisely such was the nature of the retired colonel. He was the mildest and most complaisant of men imaginable. Had it occurred to anyone to ask him very

earnestly to carry someone for a verst or two on his shoulders, he would have probably agreed. He was so kind that he would willingly give away all he had at the first call, and would share his last crust with anyone who wanted it. He looked like a legendary hero: tall and well-buit, ruddy-faced, with perfect teeth as white as ivory, a rich brown moustache, a loud ringing voice and a frank, booming laugh. He spoke jerkily, in a rush of words. He was forty or so at the time, and he had been in the hussars almost from the age of sixteen. He had married very young and loved his wife to distraction; but she died, leaving an indelible and grateful memory in his heart. After inheriting Stepanchikovo, which increased his assets to six hundred souls, he retired from the service and, as already said, settled down on his estate with his two children: eight-year-old Ilyusha (whose birth cost his mother her life), and Sashenka, a gril of about fifteen, who upon her mother's death had been placed at a Moscow boarding-school. Soon, however, my uncle's home was turned into something like Noah's Ark. This is how it came about.

Just about the time my uncle received his inheritance and retired from the hussars, his mother lost her second husband, General Krakhotkin, whom she had married sixteen years earlier, when Uncle was still a cornet but was already contemplating marriage. His mamma refused to give her blessing to his marriage for a long time, weeping bitter tears, accusing him of selfishness, ingratitude and lack of respect, and arguing that, as it was, his estate of two hundred and fifty souls was barely sufficient to support his family (that is, herself and her staff of hangers-on, her lap-dogs, Pomeranians, Chinese cats, and so on). Suddenly, in between these accusations, reproaches and screams, she got married herself, before her son did, when she was already forty-two years of age. Incidentally, she found a pretext to blame my uncle for this too, declaring that her only reason for marrying was to make sure of a refuge in her old age which her son, a disrespectful egoist, was denying her with this unpardonable impudence of wanting to start a home of his own.

I could never fathom the true motive which made a man as apparently sensible as the late General Krakhotkin marry this forty-two-year-old widow. I dare say he suspected her of money. Some thought he simply wanted a nurse, for he already had a premonition of that swarm of ailments which beset him later on in life. What is known, however, is that the general disliked his wife intensely all the time he lived with her, and made mock of her whenever he had the opportunity.

He was a queer man. Little educated but far from being a fool, he had a huge contempt for all and sundry, observed no rules, laughed at everyone and everything, and in his old age turned spiteful, irritable and graceless through illness, which was a consequence of his not very proper and righteous way of life. He had done well in the army, but as a result of some "unpleasantness" had been forced to send in his papers rather inauspiciously, barely escaping prosecution and losing his right to a pension. This added the last drop to his embitterment. With practically no means and a hundred destitute souls to his name, he sat back and for the rest of his life, for as long as twelve years, never bothered to inquire what he was living on and who was supporting him; and yet, he claimed all of life's comforts, refused to restrict himself in anything, and kept a splendid carriage. Soon he lost the use of his legs and spent the last ten years of his life in an easy chair, rocked whenever necessary by two huge footmen who never heard anything but a great variety of oaths from their master. The carriage, footmen and easy chair were provided and maintained by the disrespectful son who sent his mother all he had, mortgaging and re-mortgaging his estate, denying himself mere necessities and falling into debt, all but hopeless for him at the time. Still, the title of egoist and disrespectful son stuck. Uncle's nature, however, was such that he finally came to believe that he was indeed selfish, and so to punish himself and not be selfish he sent his mother more and more money. The general's lady worshipped her husband. Incidentally, what she liked best

about him was that he was a general and that she, as his wife, was a general's lady.

She had her own wing in the house where, during all the semi-existence of her husband, she thrived in the company of her hangers-on, town gossips and lap-dogs. She was quite a figure in her little town. Gossip, invitations to act as godmother or matron of honour, kopek-stake *preference*, and universal respect for her position of general's lady more than repaid her for any of her private frustrations. The town gossips came to report their news to her; she always had the place of honour everywhere; in short, she squeezed all she poissibly could from her position of general's lady. The general interfered in none of this; but when others were present, he would taunt his wife mercilessly, posing such rhetorical questions as, for instance: "Why on earth did I marry an old lump like her?" and no one dared to cross him. Little by little all his friends dropped him, while he craved for society; he loved to chat, indulge in an argument, and always have a listener. A free-thinker and an atheist of the old school, he also enjoyed an occasional discourse on lofty subjects.

But the listeners the little town of N. could provide did not favour lofty subjects and their calls became ever rarer. The household tried to interest him in *whist-preference*, but the game usually ended with the general going into such fits that his terror-stricken lady and her hangers-on would make haste to light holy candles and pray for divine guidance, tell their fortunes by cards and coffee beans, send loaves of bread to the prison, and then wait for the afternoon in trepidation when a new game would have to be made up, with shouts, screams, abuse, and all but beatings following every mistake they made. The general minded no one when anything displeased him: he shrieked like a fishwife, swore like a cabby, and sometimes, tearing the cards across and sweeping the deck to the floor, peremptorily dismissed his partners and actually wept with vexation and anger just because a knave had been discarded instead of a nine. Finally, his sight weakening, he demanded a reader. This is when Foma Fomich Opiskin came on the scene.

I must confess to a certain solemnity in announcing this new character, undeniably one of the leading personages in my story. I shall refrain from explaining how far he can be expected to capture the readers' attention: the readers themselves will make better judges of that.

Foma Fomich entered General Krakhotkin's household as a paid companion, no more, no less. His antecedents are shrouded in mystery. I took the trouble to inquire, however, and found out something about this remarkable man's past. He was said to have been in the civil service somewhere at some time, and had of course suffered "in the cause of justice." He was also said to have gone in for literature once upon a time in Moscow. That is quite possible: Foma Fomich's hopeless ignorance could certainly have been no stumbling-block in his literary career. All that is known for certain is that he had not succeeded in anything, and was finally forced to take on the post of reader and martyr at the general's. There was no humiliation he would shrink from for his keep. Afterwards, it's true, when the general died and Foma himself quite unexpectedly became a figure of importance and great consequence, he often assured us all that his acquiescence in being the general's clown was nothing but a generous self-sacrifice on the altar of friendship, and that the general had been his benefactor; that he had been a great and misunderstood man, and that he, Foma Fomich, had been the only trusted confidant of all his cherished secrets and thoughts; and that if he, Foma, had actually given imitations of different animals and various other performances at the general's orders, it had been done solely to amuse and cheer up a friend and martyr, whose ailments were depressing him. However, Foma Fomich's assurances and explanations on this point are much to be doubted. And yet, that same Foma Fomich, even in his days of clowning for the general, played a quite different part in the ladies' wing of the general's house. None but an expert in such matters could tell how he had managed to do it. The general's lady felt a sort of mystic reverence for him, why, no one knows. The ascendancy he gradually gained over the ladies of the household

was amazing, resembling in a way that of the Ivan Yakovleviches* and other such sages and seers that certain ladies find pleasure in visiting in the madhouse. Foma gave them readings of worthy books for the edification of their souls, and, eloquently tearful, enlarged upon various Christian virtues; he told them of his life and deeds; he attended mass and even matins, and, in some measure, acted as their soothsayer; he was particularly good at interpreting dreams and was a past master at censuring his neighbour. The general shrewdly guessed what was going on in the back rooms, and tyrannized over his dependent with even greater cruelty. Foma's martyrdom, however, inspired the general's lady and all her retinue to ever greater respect for him.

At last everything changed: the general died. His passing away was rather original. A former free-thinker and atheist, he became incredibly frightened, wept, repented, had the icons taken down to his bedside and the priests sent for. They prayed for his recovery and administered Extreme Unction. The poor man screamed that he did not want to die, and went so far as to tearfully beg Foma Fomich to forgive him. This circumstance made Foma Fomich extraordinarily conceited later on. And just before the general's soul departed from the general's body, the following incident took place. My aunt, Praskovya Ilyinishna, the daughter of the general's lady by her first husband, an old maid permanently attached to the general's household and one of his favourite victims, who was an indispensable help to him during his ten chair-ridden years, ministering to his endless needs, and who alone knew how to please him with her simple-minded and dumb meekness, came up to his bed, weeping bitter tears, to adjust the sufferer's pillow; the sufferer, however, contrived to get hold of her hair and give it three pulls, almost frothing at the mouth with spite. About ten minutes later he died. The colonel was notified, in spite of the general's lady declaring that she would not

* Ivan Yakovlevich Korcisha was a "holy man" and soothsayer famous in Moscow at the time.

see him and that she would rather die than admit him into her presence at a moment like that. The funeral was a splendid one, needless to say at the expense of the disrespectful son, who would not be admitted into his mother's presence.

In the poverty-stricken village of Knyazevka, which was owned by several landlords, and where the general, too, had his hundred souls, there stands a white marble mausoleum with inscriptions extolling the wisdom, talents, and noble-mindedness of the deceased, his medals and his general's rank. Foma Fomich took a prominent part in composing these inscriptions. The general's lady was not to be easily coaxed into forgiving her disobedient son. Surrounded by her crowd of hangers-on and lap-dogs she said, sobbing and shrilling that she would sooner eat dry bread and (this goes without saying) "wash it down with tears"; that she would sooner go begging, staff in hand, knocking on strangers' windows, than yield to her disobedient son's pleas to come and live with him at Stepanchikovo, and that she would never, never set *foot* in his house. Altogether, the word *foot*, used in this sense, is pronounced with rare effect by some ladies. The general's lady pronounced it with true artistry. In short, an incredible amount of eloquence was wasted. It must be mentioned that, while this shrilling was going on, packing was under way on the quiet for the removal to Stepanchikovo. The colonel foundered all his horses by his daily forty-verst trips from Stepanchikovo to town, and not until two weeks after the general's funeral did he receive permission to come into the presence of his insulted mother. Foma Fomich acted as go-between, upbraiding and shaming the disobedient one for two whole weeks with his "inhuman behaviour," reducing him to tears of repentance and almost to despair. It is this period that marks the beginning of Foma Fomich's unbelievable and inhumanly despotic influence over my poor uncle. Foma perceived the kind of man he was dealing with, and realized at once that his role of clown was over, and that in his case the Russian saying that "in the wilderness even a Foma is a nobleman" was apt. And he certainly made up for the past.

"What would you feel," Foma said to him, "if your own mother, to whom you owe your earthly existence, so to say, took up a staff and leaning upon it with hands, trembling and emaciated with hunger, really went begging for alms? Would it not be monstrous considering, firstly, her prestige as a general's lady and, secondly, her many virtues? How would you feel if she suddenly came, by mistake of course, but such a mistake is not excluded, to your own window, holding out her hand for alms, while you, her own son, might at that very moment be lolling on a soft feather bed and . . . well, in luxury generally. Horrible, horrible! But the most horrible thing of all, allow me to be frank, Colonel, the most horrible thing of all is that you are standing before me now like an unfeeling block of wood, gaping and blinking, which is actually indecent, for at the mere thought of such a contingency you should have torn your hair out by the root and shed streams, oh no! rivers, lakes, seas, oceans of tears!"

In short, Foma's tongue ran away with him in his excessive ardour. But such was the usual outcome of his eloquence. Naturally, it all ended in the general's lady, her hangers-on, lapdogs, Foma Fomich, and Miss Perepelitsina, her chief confidante, honouring Stepanchikovo at last with their longed-for arrival. The general's lady said she would only *try* living at her son's, that she would only put his respectfulness to the test. One can well imagine what the colonel went through while his respectfulness was being put to the test. To begin with, in the capacity of one recently bereaved, the general's lady considered it her duty to go distraught two or three times a week on recalling her irrevocably lost general, and each time, without fail and for no apparent reason, the colonel was in for trouble. Sometimes, especially if there were guests present, the general's lady would call her grandchildren to her—little Ilyusha and fifteen-year-old Sashenka—and seating them beside her she would gaze at them with a sad and martyred look as if they were children who had come to ruin at the hands of *such a father*, and, heaving a deep, grief-laden sigh, she would finally burst into silent, mysterious tears which would last at

least an hour. Woe to the colonel if he failed to *understand* those tears! And he, the poor soul, could hardly ever understand them, and in his simplicity invariably happened to be caught at those tearful moments and, consequently, whether he liked it or not was put to the test; his respectfulness, however, far from diminishing, grew to extreme proportions. In short, both of them, the general's lady and Foma Fomich, felt that the storm which had raged over their heads for so many years in the person of General Krakhotkin was definitely over, never to return. Sometimes, for no reason at all, the general's lady would collapse in a swoon on the sofa. A great fuss and commotion would follow, the colonel standing crushed and trembling like an aspen leaf.

"Oh, you cruel son!" the lady would shriek on coming to. "You've rent my insides to pieces ... *mes entrailles, mes entrailles*!"

"But, Mamma, how have I rent your insides to pieces?" the colonel would protest timidly.

"You have, you have! You'd protest your innocence, would you? He's insolent! Oh, cruel son! I'm dying!"

The colonel, of course, was crushed.

But somehow it always happened that the general's lady inevitably recovered. Half an hour later, the colonel would be explaining to someone, twirling the man's coat button:

"You know how it is, old chap, she's a *grande dame*, a general's lady! She's the kindest old lady in the world, but you know she's used to everything refined about her ... not a lumbering chap like me! That's why she's angry with me. It's my fault, of course. I don't know what I've done exactly, but there's no doubt at all that I was in fault, old chap."

Hissing venomously at the world at large, Miss Perepelitsina, a stale old maid with no sign of eyebrows over her small rapacious eyes, a false chignon, thin and compressed lips, and hands washed in cucumber lotion, would occasionally feel it her duty to treat the colonel to a sermon.

"It's because you are disrespectful. It's because you are selfish, that's why you are so insolent to your mamma: she is not

used to it. She is a general's lady and you are only a colonel."

"You know, old chap," the colonel would observe to his listener, "Miss Perepelitsina is a wonderful person, the way she stands up for Mamma! A rare young lady! And don't you imagine that she's an ordinary paid companion or anything, she's a major's daughter herself, old chap. That's what she is!"

All this, of course, was only a beginning. The same general's lady, so self-willed and so good at her whims and fits—was as timid as a mouse with her former dependent. Foma Fomich had her completely under his thumb. She doted on him, heard everything through his ears, and saw everything through his eyes. A second cousin of mine, another retired hussar, a man who had already squandered his fortune young though he was and at one time made his home with Uncle, told me simply and plainly that he was firmly convinced that the general's lady was on terms of improper intimacy with Foma Fomich. This supposition, needless to say, I instantly and indignantly rejected as too crude and simple. No, it was something else, and this something I cannot possibly explain unless I first explain to my readers the character of Foma Fomich, as I eventually came to understand it.

Imagine a creature, a complete nonentily, the most cowardly of wretches rejected by society, wanted by no one, utterly useless, utterly contemptible, but inordinately vain, gifted with absolutely nothing that could to some infinitesimal degree justify this morbidly touchy vanity. I must explain beforehand: Foma Fomich is the embodiment of boundless vanity, but a vanity which is at the same time peculiar, occurring as it does in complete nonentities; as is usual in such cases, it springs from an injured pride, which has been crushed by old reverses, has been festering since long, long ago, and oozes envy and venom at every contact, at every success that falls to another. It goes without saying that all this is garnished with touchiness at its ugliest, and suspicion at its craziest. One may ask: where does such vanity come from? How does it strike root in such utterly worthless soil, in those poor nonentities who

through their social standing alone ought to know their place in life? How can this question be answered? Who knows, perhaps there are exceptions and my hero is one of them. He is indeed an exception to the rule, which will become clear afterwards. Allow me to ask, however: are you quite sure that those who have resigned themselves to humbleness and now consider it a privilege and joy to be your clowns, hangers-on and toadies, are you quite sure that they have entirely surrendered all claims to vanity? Then what about the envy, the gossip, the backbiting, the tale-bearing, the secret whispering in your own back rooms, or at your very table? Who knows, perhaps in some of those wanderers whom fate has so humbled, in your clowns and saintly fools, vanity, rather than being stifled and killed by humiliation, is on the contrary incensed even further by that very humiliation, by the fact that they are saintly fools, clowns and toadies, by their everlasting enforced subordination and denial of individuality? Who knows, perhaps this monstrously bloated pride is just self-respect, false and perverted in the bud, which may have first been insulted in childhood by oppression, poverty and filth, or even earlier, spat upon in the future wanderer's parents, in his own presence perhaps? But I have said that Foma is an exception to the rule at that. And he is. He tried his hand at literature once and was unrecognized and disappointed; and literature, if unrecognized, is of course, capable of ruining anyone, let alone Foma Fomich. I do not know for sure but I suppose Foma Fomich met with failure even before attempting literature; it may be that his other pursuits had also brought him nothing but fillips instead of remuneration, or something that was even worse perhaps. I would not insist on it though; I made inquiries later on and know for a fact that Foma did really once write a novel in Moscow, which was very much of the sort concocted there in dozens a year in the thirties, such as those various *Liberations of Moscow, Storm Atamans, Sons of Love, The Russians in 1104*, and so on and so forth, novels which in their time provided excellent targets for Baron Brambeus's satire. It all happened long ago of course, but the

serpent of literary vanity sometimes stings deeply and incurably, especially the nonentities and the non-too-bright. Foma Fomich met with disappointment when he made his first step in literature, and there and then he irrevocably joined that vast phalanx of the disappointed, which breeds all the saintly fools, rovers, and wanderers in the world. I believe it was then that his monstrous boastfulness, his thirst for praise and esteem, for gasps of admiration and amazement began to develop. Even in his clowning days he contrived to draw together a group of idiots to worship him. Anything to lord it over someone, anyone, anywhere, to prophesy, to put on airs, to brag—this was his prime need. If no one praised him, he began to praise himself. I myself heard Foma, after he had become the undisputed ruler and soothsayer of Uncle's home at Stepanchikovo, speaking thus with mysterious solemnity: "I shall not remain long with you. I shall not live here long. I shall look, arrange your lives for you, teach you and show you the way, and then good-bye! I'll be off to Moscow to edit a periodical. Thirty thousand people will attend my lectures every month. My name will be famous at last, and then woe to my enemies!" But genius, with glory merely in the offing, demanded immediate reward. It is always pleasant to be paid in advance, and in this case particularly so. I know that he had assured my uncle quite seriously that he, Foma, was to perform a great feat, which was the reason why he had been summoned into the world, and into the performance of which he was being forced by a strange man with wings who came to him in the night, or something like that. This feat was to write a *magnum opus* profound in thought, of the soul-edifying type, which would cause the earth to quake and the whole of Russia to totter. And when the whole of Russia began to totter, he, Foma, disdaining fame, would enter the Kiev monastery and pray night and day for his Motherland's welfare. My uncle was, of course, taken in by all this.

And now, imagine what this Foma could develop into: Foma, humiliated and brow-beaten all his life and perhaps even actually beaten; Foma, secretly vain and sensual; Foma,

a disappointed man of letters; Foma, a clown for his daily bread; Foma, a despot at heart for all his earlier insignificance and impotence; Foma, a braggart and, given the opportunity, an insolent brute—imagine this Foma suddenly coming into his glorious own, pampered and praised, thanks to his idiotic benefactress and his deluded, unprotesting benefactor whose home he finally found himself in after his weary wanderings. I know I must explain my uncle's character in greater detail, for otherwise it is difficult to understand Foma Fomich's success. But for the moment, I shall only say that, in the case of Foma, the Russian saying was perfectly true: seat a pig at table, and it will put its feet on it at once. Oh, he certainly did make up for his past. A base soul freed from oppression becomes itself an oppressor. Foma had been oppressed—and he instantly felt the need to oppress others; he had been the victim of caprice—and he began to victimize others. He had been a clown, and instantly he felt the need for clowns of his own. His bragging verged on the ludicrous, and his caprices were intolerable, he demanded the rarest delicacies, tyrannized without measure, and carried things so far that good folk who had not witnessed any of his fits and outbursts but had only heard stories of them, put it all down to the marvellous or the supernatural, crossed themselves and spat to avert the evil eye.

I was speaking about my uncle. Without an explanation of this remarkable character (and I emphasize this) one cannot, of course, understand how Foma Fomich could so impudently establish himself in someone else's house, or the metamorphosis of a clown into a great man. My uncle was not only kind-hearted to excess, but, despite his somewhat crude appearance, he was also a man of exquisite tact, a man of the highest principles, and tested courage. I aver it was courage, for he would brave any obstacle if it was a matter of duty or obligation. He was as pure in heart as a child. He was indeed a child of forty, highly effusive, always cheerful, believing all men to be angels, blaming himself for shortcomings in others and exaggerating their virtues to a degree, sometimes taking them for granted where they could not possibly exist. He was one of those men,

noble in mind and pure in heart, who shrink in shame from the very thought of evil in a fellow man, who hastily deck out their neighbour in all the virtues, delight in the good fortune of others, so that the world they live in is always ideal; if something goes wrong, they always blame themselves for it, first and foremost. Sacrificing themselves in the interest of others is a vocation of theirs. Some people would call him faint-hearted, spineless, and weak. Of course he was weak and much too soft, but it was not for lack of firmness but rather for fear lest he insult another or act cruelly, from his excessive respect for others and for man as such. However, he only proved spineless and faint-hearted where his own personal interests were concerned, which he held in deep scorn and for which he suffered taunts all his life, often enough coming from those for whom he was sacrificing his interests. He refused to believe that he had any enemies: indeed he had them, but he seemed not to notice them. There was nothing he dreaded more than trouble and shouting in the house; he would yield to anyone at the first indication of trouble, and resign himself to anything. He yielded because of a shy kindliness, a shrinking tactfulness. "Never mind," he would mutter, thrusting away all criticism of his indulgence and weakness. "Oh, never mind ... let everyone be happy and content." I need hardly say that he was more than ready to submit to any high-principled influence. More than that, a shrewd scoundrel could easily gain absolute control over him, and even entice him into an evil deed if he first disguised it as an honourable one, of course. Uncle was highly credulous, and this led him into many an error. But when, after much suffering, he would at last bring himself to believe that the man who had deceived him was dishonest, he would first of all blame himself, and not infrequently himself alone. Now imagine a capricious idiot of a woman, who was going out of her head, establishing herself suddenly in his quiet home, a woman inseparable from another idiot whom she idolized, a woman who had until then feared only her general, but no longer feared anything now, and even felt that recompense was due her for all she had been

through, an idiot of a woman whom Uncle felt obliged to revere simply because she was his mother. They began by proving to my uncle that he was rude, impatient, ignorant, and moreover, selfish to the extreme. The amazing thing was that the foolish old woman sincerely believed in what she preached. But then I think Foma Fomich did so too, to a certain extent anyway. They also convinced Uncle that it was the Almighty Himself who had sent Foma to save his immortal soul and subdue his unbridled passions; they convinced him that he was arrogant, vainglorious of his wealth, and capable of reproaching Foma Fomich with his keep. Very soon my poor uncle came to believe in his moral degradation in all its depth, he was ready to tear his hair out by the roots and grovel for forgiveness.

"It's my own fault, old chap," he would say to one of his listeners. "It's all my own fault. One ought to be doubly tactful with someone who is under an obligation ... that is ... oh, what am I saying! What obligation! There, I've said something silly again. It's not that at all: it's me he is putting under an obligation by staying in my home and not I him. And I have reproached him with his keep! Rather, I did not reproach him really; it must have been a slip of the tongue which often happens with me. Besides, the man has suffered and has performed many good deeds, he has been tending a sick friend for ten years, in spite of all the insults he had to bear; all this calls for recompense. And then, science too ... he's a writer! A highly educated man! A very lofty character, in short."

Pity and indignation tore at Uncle's noble heart when he pictured Foma, educated but miserable, acting the clown for a capricious and cruel master. Uncle was quick to ascribe all Foma's queernesses, all his ignoble deeds, to his previous sufferings, humiliation, and bitterness ... he at once decided in his gentle and noble heart that one had to be less exacting with a sufferer than an ordinary man; that one should not only forgive him everything but also heal his wounds with kindness, help him to recovery and to reconciliation with mankind. Having set himself this aim, he was carried away completely,

losing all sense of proportion and all sight of the fact that his new friend was nothing less than a sensual, troublesome beast, selfish, lazy, and indolent. He implicitly believed that Foma was indeed an erudite and a genius. I have forgotten to mention that my uncle had the most naive and disinterested reverence for the words "science" and "literature," although he had never studied anything himself.

This was one of his chief and most naive peculiarities.

"He's writing!" he would whisper, walking on tiptoe although Foma Fomich's study was two rooms away. "I don't know what it is exactly," he would add with a proud and mysterious air, "but it's sure to be some first-rate wish-wash ... wish-wash in the best sense, I mean of course. It might be clear to some, but to you and me, old chap, it's such a jumble of words that ... I believe he's writing about some productive forces or other—he told me himself. It must have something to do with politics. Oh yes, his name will be famous! And then you and I will become famous through him. He told me all this himself, old chap."

I definitely know that on Foma's orders my uncle was compelled to shave off his splendid brown side-burns. Foma fancied that the side-burns made Uncle look like a Frenchman, and therefore he could not love his country enough. Little by little Foma began to meddle in the management of the estate and make profound suggestions. These profound suggestions of his were awful, in fact. The peasants soon realized what was what, who their real master was, and scratched their heads in deep concern. I heard Foma talking to the peasants one day; I confess I was eavesdropping. Foma had declared long before this that he loved a chat with a clever Russian muzhik. One day he looked in on the threshing floor; he chatted with the muzhiks about farming, although he could not tell oats from wheat, explained to them in sugared tones the sacred duties of a peasant to his master, touching slightly upon electricity and the division of labour, not a word of which he understood of course; he told his listeners how the earth travelled round the sun, and, finally, quite overcome with his own eloquence, began

to speak of the ministers. I understood what he was after. Did not Pushkin write about a certain father who tried to impress upon his four-year-old son that he, his Papa, "was so terribly, terribly brave, that the tsar loved him"? That Papa stood in need of his four-year-old listener, didn't he? And the peasants always listened to Foma Fomich with servile attention.

"And did the tsar pay you a big wage?" a grey little old man, Arkhip Korotky by name, standing in a crowd of other old men suddenly asked. Flattery was his obvious intention, but Foma Fomich detected familiarity in the question, and the one thing he could not stand was familiarity.

"And what business is it of yours, you lout?" he replied, looking at the poor old man with contempt. "What d'you mean thrusting your ugly face at me? D'you want me to spit at it?"

Foma Fomich invariably adopted this tone when speaking to a "clever Russian muzhik."

"Oh, blessed father," another peasant took up, "we're ignorant people. Why, perhaps you're a major, or a colonel or His Excellency himself—we don't even know how to address you."

"Listen, you lout," Foma Fomich repeated, but in a milder tone now. "There are wages and wages, you blockhead. A man may be a general but receive nothing—that means he's not worth it, he's doing no good to the tsar. And when I was in the minister's service, I was receiving twenty thousand, but I never took it because I served for the honour of it. I had private means. I donated my salary towards the cause of public enlightenment and the victims of the Kazan fire."

"Fancy that! So it was you who rebuilt Kazan after the fire, was it?" the peasant continued to marvel.

The peasants often marvelled at Foma Fomich.

"Yes, yes, there's my share in it too," Foma concluded grudgingly as if he were annoyed with himself for honouring a man *like that* with a conversation *like this.*

To my uncle he spoke in a different vein.

"What were you before?" he would ask for instance, lying back in his easy chair after a good dinner, while a manservant had to stand behind and drive the flies away with a green lime twig. "What were you like before you knew me? It was I who dropped a spark of that heavenly fire which is now burning in your soul. Did I or did I not drop a spark of heavenly fire in your soul? Answer me: did I drop that spark or not?"

Perhaps Foma Fomich did not quite know himself why he was asking that question. But he was instantly provoked by my uncle's silence and confusion. Previously patient and downtrodden, he now flared up like tinder at the least sign of contradiction. Uncle's silence appeared slighting to him, and so he insisted on an answer.

"Answer me: is the spark burning in your soul or not?"

Uncle hemmed and hawed, not knowing what to do.

"Allow me to remind you that I am waiting," Foma observed in a hurt voice.

"*Mais répondez donc,* Yegor!" the general's lady prompted with an impatient shrug.

"I am asking you: is the spark burning or not?" Foma repeated condescendingly, taking a sweet out of a box which was always placed in front of him on the table. The general's lady had made that a rule.

"Honestly, I don't know, Foma," my uncle replied at last with a desperate look in his eye. "There must be something of the sort.... Honestly, don't ask me or I'll go and blurt out something silly."

"Good! So you think me so worthless that I do not even deserve an answer, is that what you are implying? Very well, let it be so; let me be a nonentity."

"Why, no, Foma, God bless you! When did I ever want to imply that?"

"Yes, it was precisely this that you wanted to imply."

"But I swear I didn't, I swear!"

"Good! Now I'm a liar! Splendid! You are now accusing me of intentionally seeking a pretext for a quarrel; let this be added to all the other insults.... I shall endure everything."

"*Mais mon fils*!" cried the general's lady in a fright.

"Foma Fomich! Mamma!" Uncle called out in despair. "I swear I didn't mean it! It must have been a slip of the tongue and quite unintentional! Pay no attention to me, Foma, I know I'm stupid—I feel that myself; I can hear myself saying the wrong things. ... I know, Foma, I know it all! You don't have to say it," he went on, waving hopelessly. "I'm forty, and until recently, until I came to know you, I always imagined that I was a man ... well, just as one should be. And it had never occurred to me that I was as sinful as a goat, as selfish as I could be, and had done so much wrong it's a wonder the earth hasn't swallowed me up yet!"

"Yes, you are indeed selfish," Foma Fomich remarked complacently.

"Oh, but I do see it now, I see that I am selfish! But no more! I'll mend my ways and improve!"

"God help you," Foma Fomich concluded, sighing piously and getting up from his chair to retire for his after-dinner nap. Foma Fomich always retired after dinner.

As a conclusion to this chapter, allow me to say a few words about my own personal relations with my uncle, and explain how I happened to come face to face with Foma Fomich and find myself so unexpectedly in the whirlpool of the most important events ever to take place in the blessed village of Stepanchikovo. I shall end my introduction on this, and come straight down to the story.

In my childhood, when I was left an orphan, all alone in the world, my uncle became a second father to me, bringing me up at his own expense and, in short, doing for me what a real father does not always do for his child. From the very day he took me into his home, I came to love him with all my heart. I was about ten at the time, and I remember that we soon grew attached to one another and reached complete understanding. Together we spun peg-tops, and once stole a bonnet from one very nasty old lady, a relative of ours, which I forthwith tied to the tail of my kite and sailed up into the sky. Many years later, when I was already in St. Petersburg

finishing my course of studies at his expense, I spent a short while with my uncle again. On this occasion I grew attached to him with all the ardour of youth; I was struck by that noble, meek, truthful, jolly and extremely naive something in his character which drew everyone to him. Upon graduating from the University, I stayed on in St. Petersburg, without any occupation as yet, convinced, as is often the way with greenhorns, that I would do remarkable and even great things in the very near future. I had no wish to leave St. Petersburg, did not write to my uncle very often, and only when I needed money, which he never refused me. In the meantime, I had already heard from one of Uncle's house servants who had come to St. Petersburg on some business or other, that amazing things were happening at Stepanchikovo. These first rumours surprised me and made me curious, so I began to write to Uncle more diligently. His replies were always rather vague and queer, and in each letter he tried to keep to the subject of my studies alone, telling me of his great expectations of me in the scientific line and of his pride in my future achievements. Suddenly, after a rather lengthy silence, I received an amazing letter from him, quite unlike all his previous ones. It was full of such strange hints and such a mass of contradictions that I could hardly understand anything at first. All I could see was that the writer was extremely agitated and alarmed. The only thing the letter made clear was that my uncle, very earnestly, convincingly and all but imploringly, proposed that I should marry his former ward as soon as possible, the daughter of a certain destitute provincial official, Yezhevikin by name. The girl had received a splendid education at a Moscow boarding-school at my uncle's expense, and was now governess to his children. He wrote that she was unhappy, that it was in my power to bring her happiness, that it would actually be generous of me; he appealed to the nobility of my heart and promised to give her a dowry. As for the dowry, however, he spoke of it in veiled and timid terms, and closed the letter by swearing me to the greatest secrecy about it all. My head was in a whirl, so struck was I

by this letter. And indeed, what young man, fresh off the frying-pan so to say, would remain unimpressed by a proposal like that, with the romantic side of it anyway? Besides, I had heard that this young governess was very, very pretty. I did not know what to decide, although I wrote to my uncle on the instant that I was starting for Stepanchikovo immediately. With the letter my uncle had sent me the money for my travelling expenses. Despite all this, I tarried in St. Petersburg for three weeks, irresolute and even apprehensive. One day I suddenly came across a former fellow officer of Uncle's who, on his way from the Caucasus to St. Petersburg, had paid a visit to Stepanchikovo. The man was elderly and discreet, a confirmed bachelor. He told me about Foma Fomich with indignation, and went on to speak of a certain circumstance which I had no inkling of at the time, namely, that Foma Fomich and the general's lady had conceived the idea and were set on it, to marry Uncle to a very queer spinster, who was far from young and almost quite demented, with an extraordinary life story and a dowry of as much as half a million; that the general's lady had already managed to convince the prospective bride that they were related, and on these grounds had enticed her into the house; that Uncle was in despair, of course, but it looked as if his marriage to the half-million dowry was inevitable; and, finally, that the clever two, the general's lady and Foma Fomich, had begun to persecute the poor, defenceless governess outrageously, and were doing everything to turn her out of the house, probably for fear the colonel might fall in love with her, or perhaps because he had already fallen in love with her. This last sentence baffled me. Hard though I tried to sound the man as to whether Uncle was really in love with the girl, he seemed either unable or unwilling to give me a straight answer, and altogether he spoke curtly, reluctantly and with an obvious evasion of detail. I fell to thinking: this news clashed so strangely with my uncle's letter and his proposal. But there was no time to be lost. I decided to go to Stepanchikovo with the intention of comforting my uncle and making him see reason, and, what was more, of saving him if

I could, that is turning out Foma, breaking his hateful engagement to the stale old spinster, and then—because the conclusion I came to was that Uncle's falling in love was nothing but a captious invention of Foma's—of honouring the poor but surely attractive girl with an offer of marriage, and so on and so forth. Little by little I worked myself up into such a state that, in my inexperience and idleness, I jumped to the other extreme from my irresoluteness, and was consumed with desire to perform untold deeds and wonders as soon as possible. I actually believed I was being most generous, nobly sacrificing myself to make an innocent and lovely girl happy; in short, I remember I was well pleased with myself all the way to Stepanchikovo. It was July; the sun shone brightly; fields of ripening corn spread endlessly about me.... I had been cooped up for such a long time in St. Petersburg that it seemed to me I was only then taking my first real look at the great wide world.

II

MR. BAKHCHEYEV

I was already nearing my destination when, passing through the small town of B. with Stepanchikovo only ten versts away, I was compelled to stop at a blacksmith's close to the town gate because of a tyre that had burst on one of the front wheels of my tarantass. It would not take long to put it right enough to last the ten versts, and so I decided to stay and wait at the blacksmith's rather than go into town. As I got out of my tarantass I saw a fat gentleman who had also had to break his journey for the same reason as I. He had already been standing in the scorching heat for a solid hour, shouting, swearing, and with peevish impatience urging on the blacksmiths who were pottering about his splendid carriage. This angry gentleman struck me as a very peevish type from the very first. He was about forty-five, of medium height, very fat and pock-marked. His fatness, his Adam's

apple, and puffy, flabby cheeks spoke of a country gentleman's blissful existence. There was something effeminate in all his figure, which instantly struck the eye. He was dressed in loose, comfortable and neat clothes, which, however, made no claim to fashion.

I fail to understand why he was so angry with me as well, especially since he had never set eyes on me before and had not yet exchanged a word with me. The moment I got down from my tarantass I noticed him glaring at me. But still, I very much wanted to make his acquaintance. I gathered from the chatter of his servants that he was on his way from Stepanchikovo, from my uncle's, and this presented a good opportunity for me to find out a number of things. I raised my hat and addressed him in a most courteous manner with an observation on the unpleasantness of these occasional hitches on the road; but the fat gentleman, reluctantly as it were, measured me from head to foot with a disagreeable and peevish look, muttered something unintelligible, and slowly turned his fat back full on me. This part of his person, though in itself a highly curious object of observation, could not of course be expected to join me in a pleasant conversation.

"Grishka! Stop grumbling, or I'll have you flogged!" he suddenly shouted at his valet, as if he had not heard my remark about delays on the road at all.

This "Grishka" was an old, grey-haired servant, dressed in a long-skirted coat and wearing huge grey side-burns. He was very angry as well, judging by certain signs, and was grumbling sullenly under his breath. An argument broke out at once between master and servant.

"Flog me, will you! Yell some more!" Grishka muttered as if to himself but loudly enough for all to hear, and turned away indignantly to attend to the carriage.

"What? What did you say? 'Yell some more'? You're insolent, that's what you are!" the fat man roared, turning purple.

"But why d'you pitch into a person like that anyway? Can't put a word in edgewise."

"Who's pitching into you? D'you hear him? He's grumbling at me and I daren't pitch into him!"

"But why should I grumble?"

"Why grumble ... no reason, eh? I know why, it's because I left before dinner was over, that's why!"

"What's it to me? Don't eat at all for all I care. I'm not grumbling at you but just said something to the smiths."

"Smiths, you say.... And why grumble at the smiths?"

"It's not them, it's the carriage I'm grumbling at."

"And why grumble at the carriage?"

"For breaking down. So it won't dare break down again and always be in order."

"The carriage, you say.... Oh no, it's me you're grumbling at and not the carriage. You've got yourself to blame and now you're all up in arms."

"But really, sir, why don't you leave me alone? Let me be, will you."

"And what d'you mean sulking the whole trip, never speaking a word to me, eh? You do talk at other times, don't you?"

"A fly tried to get into my mouth, that's why I sulked and said nothing. What am I supposed to do, tell you stories or something? If you're so fond of fairy-tales take old Malanya with you next time."

The fat man opened his mouth to retort, but said nothing, evidently at a loss for a fitting reply. The servant on the other hand, pleased with his dialectics and the influence he had over his master, displayed before witnesses, turned to the blacksmiths with redoubled importance and began to point something out to them.

What with my awkwardness, I made no headway with the gentleman, but an unforeseen circumstance came to my aid. A sleepy, unwashed, and uncombed head suddenly appeared in the window of the closed carriage-body standing, with the wheels removed, in front of the blacksmith's since times immemorial, daily and vainly expecting to be repaired. The appearance of the face brought a general burst of laughter from the blacksmiths. The joke was that the man who had peeped

out of the carriage was securely locked inside and could not get out. Having slept off his inebriation therein, he now vainly begged to be released; he also pleaded with someone to run and fetch him his tool. All those present thought it highly amusing.

There are certain people who take particular delight and pleasure in some rather strange things. A grimacing drunk, a man who has tripped and fallen sprawling in the street, a wrangle between two village women, and other such scenes, evoke for some inexplicable reason the kindliest admiration in some people. The fat country gentleman was one of these. Little by little, the wrathful and sullen expression on his face gave way to pleasure and kindness, and finally cleared away completely.

"Why, it's Vasilyev," he said with sympathy. "But how did he get in there?"

"Yes sir, Stepan Alexeich, it's Vasilyev, Vasilyev it is," people shouted from all sides.

"He's been drinking, sir," added one of the blacksmiths, an elderly man, spare and tall, with a pedantically severe face and pretensions to authority over his fellows. "He's been drinking, sir. He ran off from his master three days ago, and is hiding out here, foisting himself on us. He wants his chisel now. Look, what d'you want your chisel for, you blockhead? It's his last tool and he wants to pawn it."

"Ah, Arkhip! Money's like pigeons—coming and flying away again! Let me out, for heaven's sake!" Vasilyev entreated in a thin warble, thrusting his head out of the window.

"No, you stay put, you devil, since you're caught," Arkhip said harshly. "You've been drunk since the day before yesterday; we carried you in from the street at dawn today: you ought to be grateful we hid you and told Matvei Ilyich you were sick, that your spare gripes had taken hold of you."

Everyone burst out laughing again.

"But where's my chisel?"

"Our Zui has it. There he's at it again! He's a drinking man, he really is, Stepan Alexeich, sir."

"Ha-ha! The scoundrel! So that's the sort of work you do in town, pawning your tools!" the fat man wheezed, choking with laughter, perfectly happy now and in the best of moods.

"And yet you'd have to comb all Moscow for a carpenter like him. But that's the way he always behaves, the scoundrel!" he said, quite unexpectedly addressing me. "Let him out, Arkhip, maybe there's something he needs to do."

The gentleman was obeyed. The nail with which the door had been secured, the better to laugh at Vasilyev when he had slept it off, was removed, and Vasilyev emerged, grimy, dishevelled, and ragged. He blinked in the sun, and sneezed and swayed; then, shielding his eyes with his hand, he took a look about him.

"What a crowd, what a crowd!" he said, shaking his head. "And they must be all sober, too," he drew out the words in sorrowful reflection, as if reproaching himself. "Well, good morning, brothers, good morning to you."

Laughter again.

"Good morning, he says! Look how much of the morning has gone, you stupid man!"

"Lie some more whoppers while you're at it! And what we say is: if you only have a day, gallop all the way."

"Ha-ha-ha! Listen to him talking!" the fat gentleman cried, shaking with laughter again, and once more throwing a friendly glance in my direction. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Vasilyev?"

"It's my troubles I'm drowning, sir, just my troubles, Stepan Alexeich," Vasilyev replied gravely with a hopeless wave of the hand, and evidently welcoming the opportunity to talk of his troubles again.

"What troubles, you fool?"

"Troubles the like of which we've never known yet: they're making us over to Foma Fomich."

"Who? When?" the fat gentleman cried much agitated.

I also took a step forward: quite unexpectedly the matter concerned me as well.

"All of us Kapitonovka men. Our master, the colonel, God bless and keep him, wants to give the whole of our Kapitonovka, his patrimonial estate, to Foma Fomich: he's giving him as many as 70 souls. 'There you are, Foma,' he says, 'you own next to nothing now: you're a small landowner, all you own is a couple of sparlings working for you in Lake Ladoga —that's all the serfs your late father left you in his will. Because your father,' " Vasilyev continued with malicious relish garnishing his story about Foma Fomich with juicy epithets, " 'because your father was a nobleman of ancient stock, no one knows where from, no one knows who: a gentleman's hanger-on just like you, feeding on the kitchen left-overs out of charity. And now, after I've made Kapitonovka over to you, you'll be a proper landowner too, a nobleman of old stock, with serfs of your own, you can just lie back on your stove-bed at your nobleman's pleasure and....' "

But Stepan Alexeich was no longer listening. Vasilyev's half-drunken talk had an extraordinary effect on him. The fat gentleman got so furious that he actually turned purple; his Adam's apple jerked up and down, and his tiny eyes became bloodshot. I was afraid he'd have a stroke.

"What next!" he uttered, gasping. "Foma, that scoundrel, that hanger-on, a landowner, if you please! Bother! Oh bother everything! Hey, you, hurry up! Home!"

"Permit me to ask you," I said, taking a hesitant step towards him. "You have just mentioned Foma Fomich; his name is Opiskin, if I'm not mistaken. Now you see, I should like to ... well, I have my own particular reasons for being interested in that person, and for my part I should very much like to know how far one can trust what that good man has said just now about his master, Yegor Ilyich Rostanev, wanting to give one of his estates to Foma Fomich. I am highly interested, and I...."

"And now permit me to ask you," the fat gentleman broke in, "just why does this person, as you call him, interest you? It's a damned scoundrel he should be called, to my mind, and

not a person at all. What sort of 'person' is he, the scamp? He's not a person, he's a disgrace, that's what he is!"

I explained to him that I was as yet unacquainted with his person, but that Yegor Ilyich Rostanev was my uncle, and I was Sergei Alexandrovich so and so.

"So you're that learned gentleman? My dear man, your arrival there is simply longed for!" the fat gentleman cried, genuinely pleased. "I'm on my way from there now, from Stepanchikovo. I didn't wait till dinner was over, I left when pudding was being served: couldn't stand Foma any longer. I've quarrelled with everyone there because of that cursed Foma.... And for us to meet now! You must forgive me, my dear man. I'm Stepan Alexeich Bakhcheyev and I've known you since you were so high.... Well, well, who could have thought it! Allow me...."

And the fat gentleman embraced and kissed me.

The first few moments of excitement over, I immediately began to ply him with questions: it was a splendid opportunity.

"Tell me, just who is this Foma?" I asked. "How did he come to rule over the whole household? Why don't they drive him out with horse whips? I must confess...."

"Drive *him* out? Are you in your senses? Why, Yegor Ilyich walks on tiptoe in his presence, you know. Why, Foma once ordered it to be Wednesday instead of Thursday, and all of them, every one of them, called that Thursday Wednesday. 'I don't want to have Thursday, I want Wednesday!' And so they just had two Wednesdays that week. D'you think I'm exaggerating? Not at all, not a bit. It makes you think of Captain Cook, that's all, my dear man."

"I've heard about this, but I confess...."

"I confess, I confess! How a person does harp! What's there to confess? You'd do better if you asked me what I went through. Yegor Ilyich's, I mean the colonel's mother, though a very worthy lady and a general's lady at that, has quite gone out of her mind, in my opinion: she simply dotes on that thrice accursed scoundrel of a Foma. She's the cause of every-

thing: it was she who brought him into the house. He's bemused her with his reading, she hasn't a mind of her own at all now, not at all, even though she is called Her Excellency —hopping into marriage with General Krakhotkin when she was fifty! And as for Yegor Ilyich's sister, Praskovya Ilyinishna, who's been an old maid these forty years, I don't even want to mention her. Ohs and ahs, clucking like a hen, she makes me quite sick, to the devil with her! There's nothing to her except that she belongs to the female sex, and so you're supposed to show her respect for no better reason than her being of the female sex. Bother! It's indecent to speak of this, after all she's your aunt. There's only Alexandra Yegorovna, the colonel's daughter, a mere child, she's just past fifteen, but she has more brains than any of them, I think; she doesn't truckle to Foma, it's a pure joy to watch her. She's sweet, there's no other word for it. But then who is he to truckle to? That rascal Foma was a clown to the late General Krakhotkin. Why, he used to give imitations of all sorts of animals for him, for His Excellency's amusement! Talk about the worm that turned! The colonel now, your uncle that is, honours that retired clown as if he were his own father; he's put him under glass, falls at his feet, and worships him—him, his own hanger-on! Bother!"

"But poverty is far from being a vice ... and ... I confess ... may I inquire, is he handsome or clever perhaps?"

"Who, Foma? A picture of beauty!" Bakhcheyev answered with a peculiarly spiteful quiver in his voice. (My question seemed to irritate him and he was already beginning to look at me with suspicion). "A picture of beauty! Did you hear that, good people? He thinks Foma's handsome! Why, he looks like every sort of beast, my dear man, if you really want to know. It wouldn't have been so bad if the scoundrel had wit at least, well, I'd have reconciled myself perhaps, grudgingly it's true, but I would have reconciled myself for wit's sake, but there's no wit to him at all! He's simply drugged them with something, a charlatan that's what he is. Bother, my tongue's tired. I ought to spit on the whole thing and say no

more. You've upset me with your conversation, my dear man. Hey you! Ready?"

"There's still Voronok to shoe," Grigory answered morosely.

"Who, Voronok? I'll show you Voronok.... Yes, my good sir, I could tell you things that would make you gape, and you'd stay with your mouth open till doomsday. I used to respect him too, you know, what d'you say to that, eh? I admit it, I admit it frankly, I was a fool. He made a fool of me as well. The know-all! He knows the ins and outs of everything, there's no knowledge he hasn't mastered. He gave me some drops once: you know I'm a sick man, I'm anaemic. You may not believe it but I am a sick man. Well then, after I'd taken his drops it was almost all over with me. Just say nothing, and listen: you're going there yourself, you'll have the pleasure of seeing it all for yourself. He'll have the colonel shedding tears of blood yet; why, it's tears of blood the colonel will shed because of him, but it will be too late. Why, the whole neighbourhood has stopped calling on him because of that thrice accursed Foma. Why, he heaps insult on anyone who happens to call. Who am I to mind when he spares no one, whatever the rank? He preaches to everyone; he's gone in for morals now, the scoundrel. I'm a sage, he says, I'm wiser than anyone, so listen to no one but me. I'm a learned man, he says. What if he is a learned man? Just because he is a learned man he thinks he must make short shrift of anyone who isn't? And once he starts lashing at you with his learned tongue, chatter, chatter, chatter, why it's such a wagging tongue, I declare, that if it were lopped off and thrown on the dunghill, it would go on wagging even there, it wouldn't stop wagging until a crow pecked it all away. He's as swollen with conceit as a mouse is with grain. Why, the thing he's pushing himself into won't let his swelled head through. Oh, what's the use! You know, he's taken it into his head to teach the servants French. You needn't believe me if you don't want to. He says it's good for them, for those boors, the servants. Bother it all! A thrice accursed shameless rascal, that's what he is. And what does a serf want to know French for, I ask you? And

what do we people want to know French for if it comes to that? To dilly with the girls during a mazurka and dally with other men's wives? It's sinful, that's all it is. To my mind, drink a bottle of vodka and there you'll be, talking all the languages you want. That's all the respect I have for your French. There! I dare say you, too, go jabbering in French: chat, chat, chat, Pussy's married Tom the cat!" Bakhcheyev said, glaring at me with scathing indignation. "You're a learned man, eh? You've gone in for scholarly pursuits, eh?"

"Yes... I'm interested in a way...."

"I expect you, too, have mastered all the sciences?"

"Yes, that is no.... I confess, I'm more interested in observation at the moment. I've been in St. Petersburg all this time, and now I'm hurrying to my uncle's."

"And who's forcing you to go there? Why didn't you stay where you were, since you had a place to stay in? Oh no, my dear man, your learning won't help you much here, I tell you, and no uncle in the world will help you either: you'll fall into the trap. Why, I lost weight in a single day there. Do you believe me that I lost weight there? No, I can see you don't believe me. Oh well, please yourself, don't believe me...."

"Oh no, really, I do believe you, very much so! I... but I still cannot understand...." I replied, growing more and more flustered.

"You'd better believe me, but then I don't believe you. All you people do is strut about; you and your scholarly pursuits. All you care about is skipping on one leg and showing off. No, my dear man, I dislike scholarly pursuits; they stick in my throat here! I've come across your St. Petersburg people before—a worthless lot. Freemasons all of them; spreading scepticism; afraid of drinking a glass of vodka as if it'll bite. Bother them all! You've made me angry, my dear man, I don't want to tell you anything else. After all you haven't hired me to spin tales for you, and then my tongue is tired. You can't go over the faults of everyone there is, my dear man, and besides it's a sin.... I'll only say that Vidoplyasov, your uncle's valet, almost went crazy because of him, because of

that scholar of yours. Vidoplyasov's lost his reason because of Foma Fomich. . . ."

"Why, I'd . . ." broke in Grigory, who had until then listened to the conversation sedately and sternly. "Why, I'd never stop flogging that Vidoplyasov! If I had my way with him, I'd knock that German foolishness out of him. I'd give him so many strokes—at least a couple of hundred."

"Silence!" shouted his master. "Hold your tongue, we're not talking to *you*."

"Vidoplyasov," I said in utter confusion and no longer knowing what to say. "Vidoplyasov . . . a strange name, don't you think?"

"What's strange about it? So you're at it too. Oh you, learned man, you scholar!"

My patience snapped.

"Look here," I said. "Why are you angry with me? What have *I* done? I confess I still don't understand what it's all about although I've been listening to you for half an hour now."

"Oh, but why take offence, my dear man?" the fat gentleman replied. "There's no call for it. I spoke to you in all kindness. It doesn't mean a thing that I'm so loud-voiced and have shouted at my man just now. This Grishka of mine is a perfect scoundrel, but that's precisely why I'm so fond of him, the rascal. My sensitive heart has been the ruin of me, I'll tell you frankly; and it's all that Foma's fault. He'll be the death of me, I swear he will. It's all his doing that I've been roasting in the sun here for two solid hours. I was going to call on the priest while these fools dawdled with the repairs. He's a good man, the local priest. But Foma has unsettled me so, I didn't even feel like seeing the priest. Bother them all! There isn't even a decent inn here. All of them are scoundrels, I'll tell you, every one to a man. It would be another matter if he had an extraordinary sort of rank, for instance," Bakhcheyev went on, turning to the subject of Foma Fomich again, which he evidently could not drop entirely. "He'd have the excuse of his rank then; but he doesn't hold even the lowest rank, I defi-

nitely know he doesn't. He says he suffered in the cause of justice somewhere in forty something, so now you're expected to bow and scrape before him for it! The devil himself's no brother to him! The moment he's crossed he leaps up and starts shrieking, 'They're insulting me, they're insulting my poverty, they have no respect for me!' No one dares sit down to a meal without Foma, while he refuses to appear: 'I've been insulted, I'm a humble wanderer, a crust of bread will do for me.' The moment they sit down, he comes in: and there he goes, harping on the same string! 'Why did you sit down without me? So I count for nothing in this house?' In short, he lets himself go. I kept silent for a long time. He thought I too would start dancing and prancing before him like a little dog; but, sir, I snap my fingers at the likes of him! Oh no, sir, he's no one for me to consider! Yegor Ilyich and I used to serve in the same regiment, you know. I took my discharge when I was a cadet, and he retired only last year, with the rank of colonel, when he inherited this estate. I told him: you'll ruin your life, don't pander to Foma, you'll shed tears yet. No, he said, he's the worthiest of men (that scoundrel Foma!), he's my friend and he's teaching me how to comport myself. Well, thought I, there's nothing I can say against good comportment. Matters must have really gone far if he's taken to instructing him in comportment. Now what do you think caused the rumpus today? It's St. Elijah's day tomorrow (Mr. Bakhcheyev crossed himself), the day of the patron saint of Ilya, your uncle's little boy. I had meant to spend the day there, and have dinner with them. I had ordered a toy for him from the capital: a German on springs kissing his bride's hand, while she wipes her tears away with a handkerchief—an excellent thing (I shan't give it to him now, no fear! It's there in my carriage, and the German's got his nose chipped; I'm taking it back). Yegor Ilyich himself was not against celebrating and having a bit of fun on a day like that, but Foma objected; 'What's all this fuss about Ilyusha?' he says. 'So I'm to be ignored now, am I?' A fine fellow, eh? Envying an eight-year-old boy his patron saint's day! 'I won't

have it, it'll be my day too!' he says. But it's not St. Foma's day, it's St. Elijah's. 'No,' he says, 'it's my patron saint's day as well.' I took myself in hand and waited to see what would happen. And what do you think? They're all tiptoeing about and holding whispered discussions: what's to be done? Should they treat St. Elijah's day as Foma's day, should they wish him many happy returns or not? If they don't, he may take offence, if they do—he may think they're only mocking him. Oh, bother it all! We sat down to dinner.... I say, are you listening or not, my dear man?"

"Oh, to be sure! I'm listening with particular pleasure, because I have now learnt from you ... and ... I confess...."

"It'd better be with particular pleasure! I know you and your pleasure.... Look here, you're not saying pleasure sarcastically by any chance, are you?"

"But really, why sarcastically? On the contrary. Besides, your telling of the story is so original, I'd gladly take down your words."

"What do you mean, take down my words?" Mr. Bakhcheyev asked with something like fear, a look of suspicion in his eyes.

"However, I don't think I will.... I just said so."

"You're probably just trying to flatter me into something."

"Flatter you? What do you mean?" I asked in surprise.

"Just this. You'll flatter me into telling you everything like a stupid fool, and then you'll go and describe me in some composition of yours."

I hastened to reassure Mr. Bakhcheyev that I was not that kind of person, but his look remained as full of suspicion as before.

"You'd better not be! But who knows, perhaps you're even worse. Foma, too, threatened to write about me and send it to the press."

"Allow me to ask," I interrupted him, partly to change the subject, "is it true that my uncle is contemplating marriage?"

"What if he is? That's not the worst yet. Go ahead and marry, if you're so unhinged, that's not the worst, it's some-

thing else..." Mr. Bakhcheyev added pensively. "Hm. I cannot answer you for certain on this point, my dear man. The place is cluttered up with females, like flies round a jam pot. And there's no telling which one's looking for a husband. I'll say this to you as to a friend: I dislike females. They're only human in name, but if the truth be told there's nothing but sin in them, and they're bad for your immortal soul. And as for your uncle being in love like a Siberian tomcat, you may take my word for it. I shan't say anything about it now: you'll see for yourself; the bad thing about it is that he's dragging out the business so. Once your mind's made up, go ahead and marry, I say; but no, he's afraid to tell Foma and his old mother: that one will start kicking, and raising a screech all over the village. She's all for Foma: 'It will pain poor Foma Fomich if you bring a wife into the house!' because he'd be out of the house in less than a couple of hours then. The wife would push him out with her own hands, and if she was no fool she'd do it some other way and make it so hot for him he'd never find another post in the neighbourhood again. That's why he and the dear Mamma are in league now, scheming to make him marry the sort that would.... Why the interruption, my dear man? I was coming to the most important part, and you interrupted me! I'm older than you are; it doesn't do to interrupt an old man...."

I begged his pardon.

"Never mind, never mind. You're a learned man, I wanted you to be the judge of what happened today, of the way he hurt my feelings. Judge for yourself, if there's any fairness in you. We sat down to dinner: and I'll tell you he all but ate me alive at dinner. The moment we sat down I saw that he was seething, that something seemed to be grating at his very soul. He'd have been glad to drown me in a spoonful of water, the viper! The man is so swollen with vanity, he's bursting with it. And so he began finding fault with me and teaching me how to comport myself too, if you please. Why was I so fat, he wanted to know. The man wouldn't leave me in peace: why was I fat and not lean? What sort of question is that, my dear man?

Is there any wit in it, I ask you? I answered him reasonably, 'It's God's will, Foma Fomich: one is fat and another is lean: and a mortal may not question Divine Providence.' Reasonable enough—don't you think? 'No,' he says, 'you own five hundred serfs; you're living on the fat of the land and doing no good to your country. You should be in the service, and instead you're idling at home and playing your harmonium all day.' It's true, I do like to play the harmonium occasionally when I feel low. I replied reasonably once again, 'What kind of service am I good for, Foma Fomich? What uniform could I stuff my fat into? Supposing I sneezed when I was all tightly buttoned in my uniform and all the buttons snapped, and supposing it happened in the presence of the supreme authorities and, God forbid, they took it for unseemly jocularity on my part? What then?' Tell me, my dear man, was there anything funny in what I said? But no, he had a good laugh at my expense, tittering and sniggering without end... I mean to say the man is quite devoid of decency, and then he began abusing me in French, '*Cochon*,' he says. That much French I know too. 'Oh you damn charlatan,' I thought. 'You take me for a simpleton, do you?' I kept and kept myself in hand and then I lost patience, got up from the table and blurted out to him before all those people present, 'I've wronged you, Foma Fomich, our benefactor; I almost believed you were a well-bred man, but now, brother, you've proved yourself to be just another swine like all the rest of us.' I said that and left the table, just before pudding: pudding was being served then. Bother you and your pudding!"

"I beg your pardon," I said when I had heard out Mr. Bakhcheyev's story. "I am ready to agree with you in everything, of course. But really I don't know a thing yet. You see, I have certain ideas of my own now on this score."

"And what could those ideas be, my dear man?" Mr. Bakhcheyev asked suspiciously.

"You see," I said in some confusion, "it may be out of place now, but I think I'd rather say it. This is what I think: perhaps both you and I are wrong about Foma Fomich, per-

haps all these peculiarities conceal a nature that is exceptional, even gifted, who knows? Perhaps the man is disappointed, shattered by his sufferings, avenging himself on the whole of mankind, so to say. I understand he used to be a sort of clown: perhaps he was humbled, insulted and broken by this? You see, a man of noble mind... sensitivity... and then this, the role of clown! And so he grew mistrustful of all mankind, and... and perhaps, if he were reconciled with mankind... that is with people, his nature may prove to be really exceptional, even very remarkable perhaps, and... and... and then, there must be something to that man, you know! There must be some reason why everyone worships him?"

In short, I know I was floundering terribly. It could have been put down to my youth, however, and forgiven. But Mr. Bakhcheyev would not forgive.... He looked into my eyes gravely and sternly, and suddenly turned purple with fury like a turkey cock.

"Who, that scoundrel of a Foma is so exceptional?" he brought out jerkily.

"I say, I hardly believe anything yet of what I have just said. I was just surmising...."

"And may I permit myself the curiosity of asking you, young man, have you been studying philosophy?"

"In what sense do you mean?" I asked, baffled.

"No, not in any sense: you just answer me straight out: have you been studying philosophy?"

"I confess it is my intention to...."

"Ha! I thought so!" cried Mr. Bakhcheyev, giving full rein to his indignation. "I knew it before you ever opened your mouth, my dear man, that you've studied philosophy. You can't fool me! No fear! I can smell a philosopher three versts away. Go and kiss your Foma Fomich. A remarkable man, indeed! Blast everything to hell! I almost thought you were a well-meaning man, and you.... My carriage!" he shouted to the coachman who, now that the carriage had been put in order, was already climbing on to the box. "Home!"

I had a very hard time placating him; at last he calmed down more or less, but for a long time refused to let mercy temper justice. In the meantime, he had been helped into the carriage by Grigory and Arkhip, the man who had lectured Vasilyev.

"Allow me to ask," I said, coming up to the carriage. "Will you never go to Uncle's again?"

"To your uncle's? Spit in the face of whoever told you I won't. D'you think I'm a strong-willed man and could stay away? That's the whole trouble with me that I'm a weakling and not a man. It won't be a week before I start on my way back there. And what for? But there it is: I don't know myself what for, but go I shall, and once again I'll have a scuffle with Foma. It's just my bad luck. The Lord has sent me that scoundrel of a Foma as a punishment for my sins. I'm as soft as a woman; there's no firmness in me. I'm a coward, my dear man, a first-rate coward...."

We parted friends, however, and he even invited me to dinner at his house.

"Do come and have dinner with me, my dear man. I've some vodka that's come on foot all the way from Kiev, and a *chef* who's been to Paris. The *pâtés* he concocts and the fish pies he makes are so delicious, that you'll smack your lips and offer thanks to him, the scoundrel. Oh, that scoundrel's an enlightened man. The only thing is he tipples occasionally and hasn't been flogged for a long time. It's a good thing you reminded me.... Do come. I'd have asked you to come with me today, but I feel quite spent somehow, I feel so limp I can hardly drag my hind legs. I'm a sick man, you know, I'm anaemic. Perhaps you don't believe me.... Well, good-bye, my dear man. It's time my ship set sail. There's your tarantass ready too. And tell that scoundrel of a Foma he'd better keep away from me, or I'll make the meeting so hot that he'll...."

But the end of the sentence was lost. The carriage, smartly driven away by four strong horses, disappeared in a cloud of dust. My own tarantass was ready: I got in and soon the

small town was behind me. "That gentleman was exaggerating, of course," I thought. "He was too angry to be impartial. But then again the things he said about Uncle were quite remarkable. Two men are of a mind now that Uncle loves that girl.... Hm. I wonder if I'll marry her or not?" At this I fell into deep reflection.

III

UNCLE

I confess I even felt a bit frightened. The moment I drove into Stepanchikovo, all my romantic dreams suddenly appeared quite incongruous and even foolish to me. The time was about five in the afternoon. The road skirted the estate garden. Once again, after long years of separation, I saw the huge garden where the few fleeting days of my happy childhood had passed, and which had later often come to me in dreams in the dormitories of the schools concerned with my upbringing. I jumped down from my tarantass and walked straight across the garden to the manor house. I very much wanted to go in quietly, find out all I could about everything, and, before meeting anyone else, have a long talk with Uncle. It all turned out the way I wanted it. I came to the end of the walk, lined with age-old lime-trees, and started up the steps of the terrace, from which a glass door led into the rooms. The terrace was surrounded by flower-beds, and had pots of rare plants ranged along it. Suddenly I came upon one of the "natives," old Gavrila, who had looked after me when I was a child and was now my uncle's valet. The old man was wearing spectacles, and was holding a notebook in his hands, which he was studying with extraordinary diligence. We had last seen each other two years before in St. Petersburg, where he had accompanied my uncle, and he recognized me at once. With tears of joy he rushed to kiss my hands, and as he did so his spectacles slipped off his nose and fell down on the floor. The old man's devotion was

most touching. However, stirred by my recent conversation with Mr. Bakhcheyev, I was first of all struck by the suspicious looking notebook in Gavrila's hands.

"What is that, Gavrila, surely they're not teaching you French too?" I asked him.

"They are, sir, they're training me like a starling in my old age," Gavrila answered sadly.

"Does Foma himself teach you?"

"He does, sir. He must be a very learned man."

"Learned, indeed! Does he teach you orally?"

"No, by this notebook here, sir."

"The one you're holding now? Oh, I see! French words in Russian letters—clever of him. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Gavrila, letting that ass, that arrant fool, do what he likes with you?" I cried, instantly forgetting all my magnanimous surmises about the character of Foma Fomich, for which Mr. Bakhcheyev had only a short while ago given me a piece of his mind.

"How can he be a fool if he's lording it so over our masters?" Gavrila asked.

"Hm. Perhaps you're right, Gavrila," I mumbled, pulled up short by his remark. "Come along, take me to my uncle."

"Oh, my dear sir! Why, I can't show myself inside the house, I daren't. Why, I'm even scared of *him* now. That's why I'm sitting out here with this misery of mine, scampering behind the flowers every time he comes this way."

"But what is it you're afraid of?"

"I didn't know my lesson this morning. Foma Fomich made me go down on my knees for punishment, but I wouldn't do it. I'm too old, Sergei Alexandrich, my dear sir, to have such tricks played on me. Master got angry because I disobeyed Foma Fomich. 'It's your education he's worrying about, you old fool,' he says, 'he wants to give you a good pronunciation.' That's why I'm here, learning my vocabulary. Foma Fomich has promised to give me another test this evening."

Something wanted explaining here, I thought. There must be more to this French language business than the old man could tell me.

"Tell me, Gavrila, what is he like? Is he tall and imposing?"

"Who, Foma Fomich? No, my dear sir, he's an ugly little man."

"Hm.... Look here, Gavrila, everything may yet be straightened out; it has to be, I promise you it will. But ... where is Uncle?"

"He's talking to some peasants behind the stables. The Kapitonovka old men have come here to petition. They've heard that they are to be made over to Foma Fomich, and they want to beg off."

"But why behind the stables?"

"To be on the safe side, my dear sir...."

And indeed, I found my uncle behind the stables. He was standing before a group of peasants who, with low bows, were earnestly repeating some plea of theirs. Uncle was explaining something to them with animation. I came up and called him. He turned, and we rushed into each other's arms.

He was exceedingly glad to see me, his pleasure verging on elation. He hugged me and pressed my hands.... It was as if his own son, rescued from some mortal danger, had been restored to him. It was as if my coming had averted some mortal danger from him too, as if I had brought the solution to all his misunderstandings, lasting happiness and joy to him and to all his loved ones. Uncle would never agree to be happy alone. The first transports over, he suddenly set up such a fuss that he grew quite confused and incoherent. He bombarded me with questions, and wanted to take me in to meet the family at once. We turned to go, but Uncle changed his mind, wanting to present me to the Kapitonovka men first. Abruptly, and for no apparent reason, he began to speak of some Mr. Korovkin or other, an exceptional man, whom he had met three days ago out on the road somewhere and invited for a stay, and to whose coming he was now

looking forward with great impatience. Then he abandoned the subject of Korovkin and began to speak of something else. I looked at him in delight. In answering his hasty questions I happened to mention that I should rather continue with my studies than take up a post. The moment I mentioned studies, Uncle suddenly drew his eyebrows together and made a frightfully solemn face. On learning that mineralogy was the science I had lately been studying, he raised his head and looked about him proudly, as if it were he alone, with no outside help, who had discovered and written all there had been written about mineralogy. I have already said that he revered the word "science" in the most disinterested way imaginable, all the more disinterested because he himself knew absolutely nothing.

"Ah, old chap, to think that there are people in the world who know the ins and outs of everything!" he once said to me, his eyes alight with admiration. "You sit among them and listen, and though you know perfectly well that you understand nothing, it makes you happy just the same. And why does it? Why, because there's good in it, there's wisdom in it, there's happiness for everyone. That much I do understand. For instance, I travel by train now, but my Ilyusha will perhaps fly in the air.... Well, and then of course there's trade, industry, and those currents so to say ... that is, what I want to say is, it's all to the good, say what you may.... It is to the good, isn't it?"

But let us return to our meeting.

"You just wait, my friend, you just wait," he said in a rush of words, rubbing his hands. "You'll see a real man. A rare man, I tell you, a learned man, a man of science: his name will survive the centuries. Doesn't sound bad, does it: his name will survive the centuries. It's Foma who explained this to me.... You just wait, I'll present you to him."

"D'you mean Foma Fomich, Uncle?"

"Oh no, no, my friend. I was speaking about Korovkin just then. That is, Foma also, he too.... But I meant Korov-

kin just then," he said blushing unaccountably and growing confused the moment Foma was mentioned.

"And what sciences is he engaged in, Uncle?"

"Oh sciences, just sciences in general, old chap. I can't tell you what they are precisely, all I know is it's science. The way he talks about railways! And you know," Uncle dropped his voice to a whisper and winked meaningfully with his right eye, "there's a hint of free-thinking in some of the things he says. I noticed it particularly when he began to speak of matrimony.... It's a pity I didn't understand it very well (there was no time) or I'd tell you everything word for word. And besides, he's a man of the noblest virtues. I've invited him for a stay. I'm expecting him at any moment."

In the meantime, the peasants stood staring at me, gaping as if I were an object of curiosity.

"I say, Uncle," I broke in, "I believe I'm in the way. These men must have come on business. What is it they want? I confess I have an inkling of what it is, and I'd be glad to hear what they have to say."

Uncle was instantly flustered.

"Why, of course! I'd forgotten all about it! But you see ... what can I do? They're imagining—and I'd like to know who started the rumour—they're imagining that I'm giving them, that is, the whole of Kapitonovka—d'you remember Kapitonovka, we used to drive there in the evenings when Katya was with us?—the whole of Kapitonovka, sixty-eight souls in all, to Foma Fomich! They say they won't part with me, and that's all there is to it."

"Then it's not true, Uncle? You're not giving him Kapitonovka?" my cry was akin to elation.

"Of course not. I never even had the intention. Who said I would? I did say something of the sort once, and the word was picked up and spread. And why do they dislike Foma so, I wonder. You just wait, Sergei, I'll present you to him," he added, looking at me timidly as if he already

suspected me of being another enemy of Foma's. "There's a man for you, old chap!"

"We want no one but you, we want no one!" the men suddenly wailed all together. "You are our father, and we are your children!"

"I say, Uncle," I said, "I haven't met Foma Fomich yet, but ... you see ... I did hear something. I must tell you that I met Mr. Bakhcheyev today. However, I have my own ideas on the subject. In any case, Uncle, do let the men go, and then you and I will talk about it in private. I confess, that's what I came for."

"Exactly, exactly!" Uncle took up. "Exactly! We'll let the men go and then we'll have a chat, you know, a good, long friendly chat. Well, go now, my friends," he addressed the men hastily. "And in future come to me, straight to me, whenever you want anything: just come straight to me, any time you wish."

"Oh, master dear! You are our father, and we are your children! Protect us from Foma Fomich! All the poor beg you!" the men shouted all together again.

"Listen to the fools! I told you I wouldn't give you away."

"He'd be the death of us with his teaching! He's all but done in the people here already with his teaching, they say."

"Surely he can't be teaching you French too?" I cried almost in fear.

"No, God's been merciful so far," answered one of the men, apparently a big talker, red-haired, with a huge bald patch on the back of his head, and a long, straggling pointed beard which moved up and down when he spoke as if it had a life of its own. "No, sir, God's been merciful so far."

"But what does he teach you then?"

"The way we see his teaching, your honour, is like this: get yourself a golden box to keep a copper piece in."

"What do you mean, copper piece?"

"Sergei, my dear, he's confusing you, it's not true," cried my uncle, blushing and looking terribly embarrassed. "It's just these fools understanding nothing of what he told them.

It was a way of speaking ... he didn't mean any copper piece. And it's no business of yours to understand too much and shout your head off," he addressed the red-haired man reproachfully. "He was thinking of your own good, you fool, but you won't see it and set up an uproar."

"I say, Uncle, what about the French then?"

"That's for their pronunciation, Sergei dear, solely for their pronunciation," Uncle uttered in a tone of entreaty. "He said so himself that it was for their pronunciation. And then there are certain circumstances ... you don't know, and so you can't judge. One has to understand a thing thoroughly before condemning it, old chap. It's easy to condemn...."

"And what about yourselves?" I cried hotly to the men. "Why didn't you go and tell him everything straight out? *That's* not the way, Foma Fomich, you should have said, *this* is the way! After all, you do have tongues in your heads, or don't you?"

"Where is the mouse to bell a cat, sir? 'I'm trying to teach you lumbering louts how to be clean and tidy,' he says. 'Why is your shirt dirty?' he says. It lives in sweat, that's why it's dirty. Who'd change it every day anyway? Cleanliness won't bring back the dead, and dirt won't crack your head."

"And the other day he came to the threshing floor," a tall, lean man joined in, his clothes all patched and the oldest of bast-shoes on his feet, evidently one of those who are always dissatisfied with everything and who always have a nasty, venomous remark in store for ready use. Until then he had kept in the background behind the others, listening in sullen silence and wearing a sort of ambiguous, bitterly cunning smile on his face. "And so he comes to the threshing floor. 'D'you know,' he says, 'how many versts it is to the sun?' How should anyone know? Learning's for the masters and not for the likes of us. 'No, you stupid lout,' he says, 'you don't know what's good for you. I'm an astrolomer or such like,' he says, 'I've studied everything about all God's planets,' he says."

"Well, and did he tell you the distance to the sun in versts?" Uncle broke in, suddenly brightening up and winking at me gaily as much as to say, "Watch, this is going to be fun!"

"He did, a lot of versts it was," the man answered reluctantly, unprepared for this question.

"But how much was it, how much did he say exactly?"

"Your honour should know, but we're ignorant people."

"I do know, brother, but I wonder if you remember."

"It was so many hundreds of thousands, he said. Sounded like a lot. It'd take more than three cartloads to fill."

"That's better. Don't forget it, my man. I suppose you imagined it was just a verst, a stone's throw away? Oh no, my man, the earth is round like a ball, do you understand?" Uncle went on, describing something like a small ball in the air with his hands.

The man smiled bitterly.

"Yes, it is like a ball! It stays up in the air just like that, and moves round the sun. And the sun now, it stays where it is, you only think it's moving. But there it is! And it was all Captain Cook, a navigator, who discovered it. The devil knows who did discover it, anyway." Uncle dropped his voice, turning to me. "I don't know a thing myself, old chap. Do you know how far it is to the sun?"

"I do, Uncle," I replied, amazed by the whole episode. "Still, this is what I think: lack of education breeds slovenliness, of course, but on the other hand ... teaching astronomy to peasants...."

"Exactly, exactly, slovenliness is the very word!" Uncle caught up the expression delightedly, thinking the word most apt. "A noble thought. Slovenliness, it is. I've always said so ... or rather I never said anything of the sort, but I've always felt it. D'you hear?" he shouted to the men. "Lack of education is the same thing as slovenliness, the same thing as untidiness. That's why Foma wanted to teach you things. It was for your own good, so it's all right. It's like being in military service, where you work up to every rank. That's

science for you, understand? Enough now, my friends, enough! Go in peace. I'm glad, I'm very glad . . . don't worry, I shan't forsake you."

"Protect us, father!"

"Don't forsake us, father!"

And the men fell at his feet.

"Come now, come now, that's nonsense. Kneel to God and the tsar but not to me. Go along now, behave yourselves, try to please and all the rest of it. D'you know," he suddenly turned a radiant look on me, as soon as the peasants had gone off, "a peasant loves a kind word, and a little present does no harm either. I think I'll give them something, shall I? In honour of your arrival. Shall I give them something or not?"

"Why, Uncle, you're just another Flor Silin, a charitable soul from what I can see."

"One has to be, one has to be, old chap; it's nothing. I've been wanting to give them something for a long time," he added with an air of apology. "You thought it funny, didn't you, my lecturing to the men? Don't worry, I just did it because I was so happy to see you, Sergei, my boy. I simply wanted the peasants to hear how far it was to the sun and gape. It's fun, you know, to see them gaping . . . it makes you feel sort of glad for their sake. Only, you know, don't mention it in the drawing room that I'd been talking to the peasants. I purposely received them behind the stables to be out of sight. I somehow couldn't do it in the house, old chap, it's a tricky business, and then they themselves came to me on the quiet. I did it more for their sake, you know."

"Well, Uncle, here I am!" I said to change the conversation and to get to the point as soon as I could. "I must confess that your letter surprised me so that I. . . ."

"My friend, not a word about this!" Uncle cut me short in alarm, actually dropping his voice a key. "Everything will be explained later. I owe you an explanation, an apology, in fact, but. . . ."

"You owe me an apology, Uncle?"

"Later on, later on, my friend! Everything will be explained. Well, well, you've grown into a fine fellow! My dear, dear boy! And was I looking forward to your coming! I've wanted to pour out my heart to you, so to say... you're a learned man, you're all I have ... you and Korovkin. I must warn you that everyone here is angry with you. So mind you're careful, make a good show."

"Angry with me?" I repeated, looking at my uncle in dismay and quite failing to understand how I could have angered people to whom I was a complete stranger as yet. "With me?"

"Yes, with you, old chap. But what's to be done! Foma Fomich is only slightly so ... and then Mamma, of course, followed suit. Just be careful, respectful, don't contradict, but the main thing is be respectful."

"To Foma Fomich you mean, Uncle?"

"What's to be done, my friend! I'm not sticking up for him, you know. Perhaps he really has his imperfections, and even now, at this very minute he's.... Ah, Sergei, how it all worries me! And how easily everything could have been settled, how happy and content we could all be! However, is anyone perfect? After all we're not made of gold, are we?"

"But, Uncle, look at the things he does!"

"Ah, my dear! It's just gossip, nothing but gossip. I'll tell you this, for instance: he's angry with me at the moment, and do you know why? However, it was my own fault, perhaps. I'd better tell you about it later."

"Incidentally, Uncle, I've formed an idea of my own about this," I interrupted him, anxious to voice my idea. We both seemed flustered and hurried. "To begin with, he used to be a clown: it grieved and shocked him, it was an insult to his ideal: and as a result there's his embittered, morbidly touchy nature, avenging itself on mankind, so to say. But if he were reconciled to mankind, if he were to regain his better self...."

"Exactly, exactly," Uncle cried in delight. "That's exactly it! A truly noble thought! And it would be actually shameful, ignoble of us to criticize him. That's it exactly. Ah, my

friend, you do understand me: you've brought me relief. If only things were settled *there*! D'you know I'm actually afraid to go in there now. Now you've come, I'm sure to be taken to task."

"Uncle, if it's like that, perhaps I ..." I stammered on hearing this admission.

"No, no, no! Not for anything in the world!" he cried, gripping my hands. "You are my guest, it's my wish."

All this baffled me completely.

"Uncle, tell me without further ado," I insisted, "why did you send for me? What do you expect of me and, what's more, why do you owe me an apology?"

"Oh, my friend, don't ask me! Later! The whole thing will be explained later. I may be guilty of many things, but I wanted to act like a man of honour and ... and ... and you will marry her. You'll marry her if there's a grain of chivalry in you!" he added, flushing with a surge of some emotion and squeezing my hand feelingly and tightly. "But enough, not another word! You'll soon learn everything. It will depend on you, you know. The main thing now is to impress them and make them like you. The main thing is not to be put out."

"But, I say, Uncle, who is it you mean? I must confess I've not been in society much, and I...."

"You're a bit frightened, eh?" Uncle finished for me with a smile. "Oh, don't worry, it's only the family. Keep your chin up, that's the main thing, and don't get frightened. Still, you worry me.... Who is it I mean, you ask? Let me see.... There's Mamma," he said hurriedly, "you do remember Mamma or don't you? She's the kindest, the most worthy old lady in the world; there's no nonsense about her, I can tell you that; there is a hint of the old school in her, but that's all to the good. You know, she has whims sometimes, she says things. She's angry with me now, but it's my fault, I know it is. Well, and then she's what you'd call a *grande dame*, a general's lady, you know ... her husband was a wonderful man; a general, to begin with, a highly educated man.

He had no wealth to leave but then he was a battle-scarred warrior; a man deserving of respect, in fact. Then there is Miss Perepelitsina. As for her ... I don't know ... lately she's become sort of ... her disposition is sort of.... However, we can't go pulling everyone to pieces. Let her be. Don't think for a moment that she's just a hanger-on. Oh no, old chap, her father was a major. She's Mamma's companion, her friend. Then there's my sister, Praskovya Ilyinishna. As for her, there's no need to say much: a simple, kindly soul; she does fuss a bit, but her heart is pure gold!—the heart is what counts—she's getting on in years, but that funny chap Bakhcheyev is after her. I think, he wants to marry her. But don't you say a word to anyone—it's a secret. Well, who else is there? I shan't tell you about the children, you'll see them for yourself. It's Ilyusha's name's day tomorrow.... Oh yes, it almost slipped my mind: there's Ivan Ivanich Mizinchikov, he's been staying with us for a whole month now, your second cousin, I believe; yes, that's exactly what he is, your second cousin. He was a lieutenant in the hussars, but retired a little while ago. He's still quite young. A very worthy character. But, you know, the way he has squandered everything is amazing and I really don't know how he managed it. However, he never had much to his name; still, he did squander it and made a pile of debts.... He's staying with me now. I did not know him at all; he just came and introduced himself. A nice, kind, quiet, and respectful man. No one here has ever heard a word from him. He never says anything. Foma has nicknamed him "the reticent stranger" in fun, he doesn't mind. Foma is pleased and he says Ivan is not too bright. But then Ivan does not cross him in anything, and agrees with everything he says. Yes ... a downtrodden sort of chap. Oh, never mind, you'll see for yourself. And there are some guests from town: Pavel Semyonich Obnoskin and his mother; he's young but highly intelligent. There's something mature and stable about him, you know. It's just that I can't put it into words; and besides his morals are impeccable. Very strict. And lastly, we have staying with us a certain Tatyana Iva-

novna, who is by way of being a distant relative of ours—you don't know her—she's unmarried, not too young, I must admit, but... she has her points. She's so rich, old chap, that she could buy up two Stepanchikovos. She's just come into it, and lived in misery before. I must ask you to be careful, Sergei old chap: she's so vulnerable, you know there's something phantasmagorial in her character. But then you're a gentleman, you'll understand; she's known adversity, you see. One has to be twice as careful with a person who's known adversity. I don't want you to think there's anything out of the way, however. She has her failings, of course; she gets so flustered sometimes, speaks so fast and always says the wrong word. She doesn't mean anything wrong, don't think that ... it's all, how shall I put it, it all comes from her pure and honest heart, old chap, I mean to say that even if she does talk rubbish sometimes, it's only because her heart is too noble, so to say—understand?"

It seemed to me that Uncle was terribly embarrassed.

"Listen, Uncle," I said. "I love you so much ... tell me frankly: are you going to marry someone here or not?"

"Why, who could have told you?" he asked, blushing like a child. "Look here, my friend, I'll tell you everything: to begin with, I am not marrying anyone. Mamma and, to some degree, my sister and, of course, Foma Fomich whom Mamma adores—quite rightly, quite rightly too: he's done so much for her—they all want me to marry this Tatyana Ivanovna, which is a very wise thing for me to do, for the sake of the family, that is. It's my own good they're thinking of, naturally; I do appreciate it. But I won't marry her for the world, I've sworn it to myself. Still, I couldn't stand up to them outright: I did not say yes or no. It's always the way with me, old chap. And so they think that they have my consent and they are insisting that tomorrow, being a family holiday, I should propose ... and that's why there's such a fuss about tomorrow, I hardly know what to do. Besides, Foma Fomich is angry with me. I don't know why; Mamma is, too. I must confess, old chap, that I was longing

for you or Korovkin to come ... to pour out my troubles to, so to say."

"But how could Korovkin help, Uncle?"

"He will, my friend, he will, he's that sort of man, you know. A man of science—that says it. I'm relying on him absolutely; he's an irresistible man. The way he talks on matrimony! I confess I was hoping you'd help too; I thought you'd make them see reason. Judge for yourself: granted I'm to blame, really to blame—I do understand, I'm not without feeling, still I could hope to be forgiven some time, don't you think? And then we'd all be so happy. Ah, my dear, how my Sashenka has grown, she's almost old enough to marry. And my Ilyusha's such a big boy now, it's his name's day tomorrow. But it's Sashenka I'm worried about, that's the trouble."

"Uncle, where's my valise? I'll change and be with you directly, and then...."

"It's in the mezzanine, my friend, in the mezzanine. I told them to take you straight up there the moment you arrived so no one should see you. That's right, go and change. Good, splendid, splendid! While you're changing I'll try and prepare all of them. Go on, now. One has to use wile, old chap. One can't help becoming a Talleyrand. Oh, but never mind. They're having tea now. We have it early. Foma Fomich likes his tea the moment he wakes up; it's better that way, really. Well, I'll go in, hurry up and join me, don't leave me there all alone; it's rather awkward going in alone. Oh yes, there's something else. I've another favour to ask you: don't shout at me there the way you did here, will you? If there's anything you want to point out to me do it afterwards, when we're alone, but until we are try and keep yourself in hand, wait. I'm in their bad books as it is. They're angry."

"I say, Uncle, it seems to me from all that I have heard and seen that you're a...."

"A simpleton, d'you mean? Go on, finish it," he broke in quite unexpectedly. "What's to be done, old chap. I know it

myself. You will come, won't you? And please hurry and come soon."

When I reached my room, I hurried to my valise remembering Uncle's orders to come down as soon as possible. It struck me, as I was changing, that after a solid hour's talk with Uncle I had learnt next to nothing of what I had wanted to discover. The only thing that was somewhat clear to me was that Uncle still persisted in his wish that I should marry the girl: it followed, therefore, that all those contradictory rumours about Uncle himself being in love with that same young lady, were erroneous. I remember that I was much agitated. Among other things, it occurred to me that my coming and saying nothing to Uncle amounted to almost a promise, a pledge binding me for ever. "How easy it is," I thought, "to say that one word that will tie you hand and foot for ever afterwards. And I haven't even seen the girl yet!" And another thing: why should a whole family feel so hostile towards me? Why should all of them look upon my arrival with enmity, as Uncle said? And Uncle himself, what a queer role he was playing in his own house! What was behind this secretiveness of his, all his fears and worries? I must admit that I suddenly saw it all as something utterly senseless; as for my romantic and heroic dreams, these vanished at the first impact with reality. Only now, after my talk with Uncle, did I suddenly see all the incongruity, all the eccentricity of the thing he had proposed to me, and I realized that no one but Uncle could have been capable of making such a proposition and in such circumstances. I also realized that by hurrying hither madly at his first call and gladly falling in with his suggestion, I had been much of a fool myself. I hastily changed my clothes, so lost in my troubled thoughts that I did not at once notice the valet who was in attendance.

"Will you wear your Adelaide coloured tie or this one with the small check, sir?" the man suddenly asked, addressing me with an extraordinary obsequiousness.

I glanced at him and saw that here was another object deserving of study. He was still a young fellow, and for a valet his clothes were splendid, as good as any city dandy's. His brown coat, white trousers, cream-coloured waistcoat, patent-leather half-boots, and pink tie were evidently not random selections. One was obviously supposed to be instantly impressed by the young dandy's refined taste. For the same reason his watch chain was certainly displayed for all to see. His face was pale and even greenish; the nose was big, hooked, thin, and of an extraordinary whiteness, looking as if it were made of porcelain. The smile on his thin lips was expressive of sadness, but a refined sort of sadness at that. His eyes, big and goggling, glassy eyes they seemed, stared with extraordinary stupidity, but still there was that hint of refinement peeping through as well. His thin soft ears were stopped with cotton to protect his refined hearing. His long, thin, straw-coloured hair was curled and pomaded. The small hands were so softly white and clean that they might have been washed in rose water; the nails were extravagantly long, pink, and foppish. All this went to show that he was the household pet, an idle fop and a fine gentleman. He lisped and slurred over his r's in the most fashionable way, raised and dropped his eyes, sighed and minced beyond all measure. He smelled of scent. Short, flabby and puny, he had a peculiar way of bending his knees when he walked, probably thinking this the height of refinement, in short, he was completely drenched in refinement, subtlety, and an extraordinary sense of his own dignity. This last, for some reason, vexed me from the outset.

"So that tie is Adelaide coloured?" I asked with a stern look at the young valet.

"Yes sir, it's Adelaide coloured," he replied, his air of refinement unruffled.

"And is there an Agrafena colour?"

"No, sir. There couldn't be."

"Why not?"

"Agrafena's not a decent name."

"Not decent, but why?"

"It's well known that Adelaide is a foreign name, therefore, it's ennobled. And Agrafena is what any village wench might be called."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"No, sir, I'm not out of my mind. It's your privilege to call me names if you wish, of course, but my conversation had been found pleasing by many generals and even some counts from the capital."

"What's your name?"

"Vidoplyasov."

"So you're Vidoplyasov!"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll get to know you too before we're much older."

"This place is something like Bedlam, it seems to me," I said to myself as I went downstairs.

IV

TEA

The drawing-room gave on the terrace where I had come across Gavrila earlier that day. Uncle's mysterious warning about the reception awaiting me disturbed me not a little. Youth is given to excessive pride, and the pride of the young is almost always cowardly. That is why I was extremely put out when, on coming into the room and seeing the whole party at the tea-table, I suddenly tripped on the rug, staggered, and in an effort to keep my feet dashed headlong into the middle of the room. Mortified as though I had wrecked my whole career and ruined my good name and honour, I stood motionless, as red as a lobster, staring stupidly at the tea party. The only reason why I am mentioning this incident, trifling in itself, is because of the dire effect it had on my state of mind the rest of that day and, consequently, on my attitude towards some of the characters in my story. I tried to make a bow but stopped half-way,

blushed an even brighter red, rushed to Uncle and gripped him by the hand.

"Good afternoon, Uncle," I uttered, gasping, quite unexpectedly bringing out nothing better than "good afternoon," whereas I had wanted to say something entirely different and much more witty.

"Good afternoon, my dear," Uncle replied, with sympathy for me in his voice. "We've seen one another already, you know. Do pull yourself together," he added in a whisper. "Worse than this might happen to anyone, old chap. I remember wishing myself dead.... And now, Mamma, allow me to present our young man to you; he was put out a bit, but I'm sure you'll come to love him. My nephew, Sergei Alexandrich," in such words he presented me to the party.

Before I go on with my story, permit me, dear reader, to present to you one by one all the company in which I suddenly found myself. The sequence of the story, in fact, demands it.

The whole party consisted of several ladies and only two men, besides Uncle and me. Foma Fomich, whom I was so anxious to meet and who, I felt even then, was the sovereign ruler over this entire household, was not there; he was conspicuous by his absence, and he seemed to have taken the light out of the room with him. Everyone was gloomy and worried. One could not help noticing it immediately; embarrassed and upset as I myself was just then, I saw that Uncle, for one, was almost as upset, albeit he was trying very hard to conceal his anxiety under a show of breeziness. Something was burdening his heart with the weight of a stone. One of the two men in the room was that same Obnoskin whom Uncle had mentioned earlier, praising his intelligence and morals—a young man of twenty-five or so. This gentleman impressed me most unfavourably. Everything about him strove for stylishness in very poor taste: his clothes, though stylish, were rather threadbare and cheap; there was something threadbare in his face as well. His beetle moustache, straggling and pale, and his tufty apology for a beard were evi-

dently intended to qualify him as a man of independent views and, perhaps, a free-thinker. He was continually squinting, smiling with a pointed sort of malice, striking attitudes in his chair and raising his lorgnette to look at me; but whenever I turned towards him he instantly dropped his lorgnette and seemed to shrink. The other gentleman, who too was a young man of twenty-eight or so, was my second cousin Mizinchikov. His reticence was truly remarkable. He did not utter a sound throughout tea, neither did he laugh when the others did; but, unlike my uncle, I saw nothing "downtrodden" in him; on the contrary, the look in his light brown eyes spoke of determination and incisiveness of character, as it were. Mizinchikov had a dark complexion, his hair was black and his face quite handsome; he was dressed very decently—at Uncle's expense, as I later found out. Of the ladies I noticed Miss Perepelitsina before the others because of her peculiarly spiteful, bloodless face. She was sitting close to the general's lady—whom I shall describe later—not quite next to her but, deferentially, a little behind her; she kept bending forward to whisper into her patroness's ear. Two or three elderly companions sat primly by the window, absolutely silent, unassumingly hoping for tea, staring goggle-eyed at their gracious mistress. I was also impressed by a fat, quite shapeless lady of fifty or so, dressed very tastelessly and gaudily, with, I believe, rouged cheeks and almost no teeth, instead of which there stuck some decayed and broken bits and pieces; this, however, did not stop her from chirping, mincing, grimacing, and all but making eyes. She was adorned with a variety of chains and, like Mr. Obnoskin, kept training her lorgnette at me. This was his mamma, Anfisa Petrovna. Praskovya Ilyinishna, my meek aunt, was pouring out the tea. She looked as if she would have liked to kiss me after our long separation and shed a few tears, of course, but she did not dare. Everything here seemd to be under restraint. Beside her sat a very pretty, black-eyed girl of fifteen, whose gaze was fastened on me with childish curiosity. This was my cousin Sashenka. Finally, there was a

very queer-looking lady, the most striking of all in appearance, I should say, dressed magnificently but much too youthfully although she was far from young, thirty-five at least. Her face was very thin, pale, and withered, but highly animated. A bright flush coloured her pale cheeks at her every movement, her every tremor of excitement. This excitement never ebbed: she kept fidgeting as though she were incapable of sitting still for a minute. She peered at me with avid curiosity, leaning over and whispering to Sashenka or the lady on her other hand every other minute, and then bursting into the most artless and childishly merry laughter. To my surprise, no one took any notice of her eccentric behaviour or appearance, as if they had all agreed on ignoring it beforehand. I guessed that this was Tatyana Ivanovna, the one who, according to Uncle, had something phantasmagorial about her, the prospective bride they were forcing on him, whose wealth made almost the entire household fawn on her. Incidentally, I liked her eyes, blue and docile; already there were tiny wrinkles around the eyes, but their gaze was so artless, merry, and kind, that it was a peculiar pleasure to meet it. This Tatyana Ivanovna, one of the leading "heroines" of my story, I shall speak of in more detail later on: her life story is noteworthy. When I had been in the room for about five minutes, a sweet little boy, my cousin Ilyusha, came running in from the garden; both his pockets were stuffed with knuckle-bones and in his hands he held a peg-top. He was followed by a slender young girl, who looked somewhat pale and tired, perhaps, but was very pretty for all that. She glanced searchingly, mistrustfully, and even timorously at everyone in the room, looked keenly at me for a moment, and then sat down next to Tatyana Ivanovna. I remember the thud my heart gave: why, this *was* the governess.... I also remember Uncle darting a swift look at me when she appeared, and then, blushing furiously, bending down, picking up Ilyusha and carrying him to me for a kiss. Another thing I noticed was Mme Obnoskina first staring hard at Uncle and then, with a sarcastic smile, raising her lorgnette to quiz the governess. Uncle was complete-

ly flustered; he kept casting about for something to do and called to Sashenka to come and meet me, on which she merely rose and dropped me a curtsy, silently and gravely. It became her greatly, and so I thought it very nice. Just then my kind-hearted aunt, unable to contain herself, abandoned her tea-pouring duties and rushed to me with open arms. Before I could say two words to her, however, Miss Perepelitsina began to shrill in her strident voice, "You're neglecting Mamma (the general's lady). Praskovya Ilyinishna, Mamma wants her tea, and you're not pouring it out, and Mamma is kept waiting." Praskovya Ilyinishna left me and dashed back to her duties.

The general's lady, the person of greatest importance in this circle, upon whom everyone danced attention, was a gaunt and spiteful old woman in deep mourning—she was spiteful more from old age and the loss of her remaining mental faculties (never too great, for that matter) than from anything else; when she was younger she was just foolhardy. Her promotion to a general's lady had made her even more stupid and conceited. When she went into a tantrum the house resembled some corner in hell. She had two methods of being angry. The first was a silent one: the old woman would refuse to open her lips for days on end, would keep stubbornly silent and push away, or sometimes even throw down on the floor, whatever was placed before her. The second method was in complete contrast to the first. It was garrulous. As a rule it began with Grand-aunt—she was my grand-aunt, you know—sinking into hopeless despondency, awaiting the destruction of the universe and her household, foreseeing destitution and every possible disaster, and, inspired by her own misgivings, counting the coming disasters on her fingers and really becoming quite heated and even ecstatic in the process. It transpired, of course ,that she had foreseen all of it long ago and had only kept silent because she was forcibly compelled to keep her council "in this house." "If only she had been shown more respect, if only she had been listened to before. . ." and so on and so forth; all this was readily supported

by her flock of paid companions and Miss Perepelitsina, and was then solemnly endorsed by Foma Fomich. At the moment when I was being presented to her she was terribly angry, according to the first method, I believe—the silent and the more terrifying one. Everyone looked at her in fright. All but Tatyana Ivanovna, who, forgiven absolutely anything, was in the happiest of moods. Uncle purposely took me up to Grand-aunt with some ceremony, but the lady, making a wry face, angrily pushed her cup away.

"Is that the *vol-ti-geur*?" she asked Miss Perepelitsina, chanting the words through set teeth.

I was completely put out by this inane question. Now why did she call me a *voltigeur*? But then such questions were nothing for her. Miss Perepelitsina leaned over and whispered something in her ear; but the old lady merely waved her away angrily. I stood gaping, my puzzled eyes on Uncle. Everyone exchanged looks, and Obnoskin went so far as to grin, which annoyed me terribly.

"She does wander sometimes, old chap," Uncle whispered to me, rather put out too. "But it's all right, she doesn't mean it, it's from the kindness of her heart. The heart's what counts, old chap."

"Yes, the heart! the heart!" Tatyana Ivanovna's voice rang out sharply and suddenly. She had been watching me all this time, for some reason unable to keep still for a moment; the word "heart" spoken in a whisper must have reached her.

She did not go on, although she obviously had some thought she had wanted to put into words. She broke off abruptly, either from shyness or for some other reason, blushed terribly and, quickly turning to the governess, whispered something in the girl's ear; suddenly, pressing her handkerchief to her mouth, she fell back in her chair and burst into hysterical laughter. I looked at everyone in extreme perplexity: but to my surprise they all remained composed, as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. I understood, of course, what Tatyana Ivanovna was. At last I was given a cup of tea, and pulled myself together somewhat. I don't know why, but

suddenly I felt obliged to start a pleasant conversation with the ladies.

"You were right, Uncle," I began, "to warn me that I might be put out. I frankly admit it—why conceal it?—that until now I have hardly ever been in the society of ladies," I went on with an ingratiating smile at Mme Obnoskina, "and just now, after making that unfortunate entry, I'm sure I must have looked very funny standing in the middle of the room, rather like a simpleton, don't you think? Have you read *The Simpleton*?" I ended lamely, growing more and more ashamed of my ingratiating outspokenness, and looking wrathfully at Obnoskin who, with a grin on his face, was still subjecting me to a close scrutiny.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly!" Uncle cried eagerly, relieved and delighted that everyone was in conversation at last and that I was pulling myself together. "That's nothing, old chap, what you've just said about being put out. You were put out, and that's the end of it. But I actually told a lie on my *début*, would you believe it, old chap? Upon my soul, Anfisa Petrovna, it's worth hearing. When I first joined the cadet corps I came to Moscow and, armed with a letter of introduction, proceeded to call upon a certain very important lady, she was the most arrogant lady in the world, but at heart she was very kind, whatever may have been said about her. She was receiving that day. The drawing-room was crowded—bigwigs for the most part. I made my bow and sat down. She turned to me and asked: 'Are you a landowner, young man?' I did not have a chicken to my name then; what could I say? I was completely at a loss. Everyone was looking at me (I was just a miserable cadet to them). Why not answer: I have nothing. That would have been honourable, since it was the truth. But no, I couldn't do it. 'Yes, I own 117 souls,' I blurted out. Why 117? Since it was a lie anyway, why not make it a round number, don't you agree? The next moment, the very letter of introduction I had brought revealed the truth that I didn't own a thing and was a liar into the bargain. Well, what was to be done? I fled as

fast as my legs would carry me and never set foot in the house again. I possessed nothing then, you know. I've inherited all I have now: three hundred souls from my Uncle Afanasy Matveich, and before that the two hundred souls plus Kapitonovka from my grandmother Akulina Panfilovna, that makes five hundred odd. That's fine. But on that day I swore I'd never tell a lie again and I never do."

"Oh, I shouldn't have sworn if I were you. You never know what might happen," Obnoskin remarked with a mocking smile.

"To be sure, it's true, too true! You never know what might happen," Uncle repeated artlessly.

Obnoskin threw his head back and gave vent to a loud burst of laughter; his mamma smiled; Miss Perepelitsina tittered with peculiar nastiness; Tatyana Ivanovna laughed without knowing the reason and even clapped her hands, in fact, I plainly saw that Uncle was regarded as an absolute nobody in his own house. Sashenka, her eyes glittering angrily, looked hard at Obnoskin. The governess blushed and dropped her eyes. Uncle looked puzzled.

"Why? What's up?" he asked, looking in wonder at everyone in turn.

All this time my second cousin Mizinchikov sat apart saying nothing, without even smiling when everyone laughed. He was absorbed in his tea, gazing upon the gathering with the mien of a philosopher, and once or twice, to relieve his unbearable boredom it seemed, breaking into a whistle probably from habit, but pulling himself up in time. I noticed that Obnoskin, while freely baiting Uncle and making attempts upon my person, did not dare even look at Mizinchikov. I also noticed that my taciturn cousin kept glancing at me with unconcealed curiosity, as if he were trying to determine precisely what sort of person I was.

"I'm convinced," Mme Obnoskina suddenly chirped, "I'm quite convinced, *Monsieur Serge*—that's right, isn't it?—that you were far from being a ladies' man in that St. Petersburg of yours. I know it's the fashion with very, very many young

men there to shun the society of ladies. To my mind they must all be free-thinkers. I refuse to ascribe it to anything else but unpardonable free-thinking. And I confess it amazes me, young man, it simply amazes me!"

"I have not been in society at all," I responded with unusual animation. "But that's . . . at least I think it doesn't matter. I lived, that is, I rented lodgings . . . but it's of no consequence, I assure you. I shall go into society; until now I've always stayed at home."

"Engaged in study," Uncle put in, assuming a dignified air.

"Oh, Uncle, you're always harping on studies! Fancy," I continued with untoward familiarity and a pleasant grin, addressing Mme Obnoskina once again, "my dear uncle is so keen on science that he has unearthed some wonder-working practising philosopher out in the road somewhere, a Mr. Korovkin; and the first thing he said to me today, after all these years of separation, was that he was looking forward to the visit of this extraordinary miracle man with, so to say, tremulous impatience . . . all because he's so devoted to science, needless to say. . . ."

And I began to snigger in the hopes of drawing general laughter in appreciation of my sharp wit.

"Who's that? Who's he talking about?" the general's lady spoke sharply, addressing Miss Perepelitsina.

"Yegor Ilyich has gone and invited some learned man to stay; he goes about picking his guests up on the road," she piped with malicious delight.

Uncle was quite put out.

"Oh yes, I'd quite forgotten!" he cried with a look of reproach at me. "I'm expecting Korovkin. A man of learning, a man whose name will survive the centuries."

He stopped short and fell silent. The general's lady waved in deprecation and so luckily this time that she swept her cup which fell on the floor and was smashed. A general bustle ensued.

"She always does that when she's angry, she always throws something on the floor," Uncle whispered to me in perplexity.

"But it's only when she is angry. Pay no attention, old chap, don't mind, look the other way. Now why did you have to bring up Korovkin?"

But I was already looking the other way: I had intercepted the governess's glance, and it seemed to me that it held reproach and even contempt for me; a flush of indignation had set her pale cheeks on fire. I read her glance and realized that my cowardly and shabby attempt to make Uncle ridiculous in order to make myself a little less so had not helped me overmuch in winning the young lady's favour. I cannot express how ashamed I felt.

"And I'm back on the subject of St. Petersburg with you again," Anfisa Petrovna twittered on, once the excitement caused by the broken cup had died down. "Our life in that charming city is such a delightful memory! We were great friends with a certain family there, remember, Paul? General Polovitsin. Ah, what a charming, charming creature his wife was. The true aristocracy, you know, the *beau monde*! . . . Tell me, you've probably met . . . I confess I was looking forward to your coming here: I was hoping to hear a great deal, a very great deal about our St. Petersburg friends from you."

"I'm very sorry that I cannot . . . forgive me . . . I've already said that I rarely go into society and I don't know General Polovitsin at all, I've never even heard the name," I replied brusquely, shedding my affability all at once and feeling vexed and peevish.

"He was studying mineralogy," my incorrigible uncle offered proudly. "Mineralogy's examining pebbles and things, isn't it, old chap?"

"Yes, Uncle, stones."

"Hm. . . . Yes, there are many sciences, and all of them useful. To tell you the truth, old chap, I had no idea what mineralogy was. All I knew was that it was something not up my street. In anything else I manage as well as the next man, but when it comes to science I'm just a fool, I confess it frankly."

"You confess it frankly?" Obnoskin asked with a sneer.

"Papa!" Sashenka exclaimed with a look of reproach at her father.

"What is it, my sweet? Oh, good heavens, how I do keep interrupting you, Anfisa Petrovna," he cried, misunderstanding Sashenka's exclamation. "Forgive me, I pray."

"Oh, don't be put out," Anfisa Petrovna reassured him with a sour little smile, "I have already said all I had wanted to say to your nephew. I will merely add, *Monsieur Serge*—it is right, isn't it?—that you must really change your ways. I shan't deny that science, fine arts ... sculpture, for instance, ... well, shall we say all those lofty ideas have their own fascination, of course, but it's not the same as ladies. Women, young man, women make you what you are, and so you can't do without them, young man, you simply cannot!"

"You cannot, cannot!" Tatyana Ivanovna's somewhat shrill voice was heard again. "Listen," she began with the urgency of a child, blushing all over, of course. "Listen, I want to ask you something."

"At your service," I replied, looking at her intently.

"I wanted to ask you: will you be staying here long?"

"I honestly don't know, if my affairs...."

"Pooh, affairs! What affairs could he have! Oh, the madman."

And Tatyana Ivanovna, blushing even redder and hiding her face behind her fan, turned to the governess and began whispering to her. Then she suddenly burst out laughing and clapped her hands.

"Oh wait, wait!" she cried, tearing herself away from her confidante and addressing me urgently as though afraid I might run away. "Listen, d'you know what I want to say to you? You remind me most awfully, most awfully, of a young man, a charming young man!... Sashenka, Nastenka, d'you remember? He's very much like that madman, you remember, Sashenka? Remember we went for a drive and met him ... on horseback in a white waistcoat ... remember his training his lorgnette at me, the shameless fellow! Remember, I covered my face with my veil, but then I was so angry I simply had

to lean out and shout to him, 'For shame!' I shouted, and then I threw my bouquet into the road . . . remember, Nastenka?"

And the all but love-crazy young lady, greatly excited, buried her face in her hands; she jumped up abruptly, flew to the window which had some potted plants ranged on the sill, broke off a rose, threw it at my feet, and rushed out of the room. She vanished in a flash. This time, everyone was rather embarrassed, except for the general's lady whose calm remained as unruffled as during the first outburst. Anfisa Petrovna looked worried rather than surprised, and threw a wistful glance at her son; the girls blushed, and Mr. Obnoskin, with a look of annoyance which I could not explain at the time, left his chair and walked to the window. Uncle began to make some signs to me, but just then a new guest walked into the room and drew everyone's attention to himself.

"Oho, here's Yevgraf Larionich! Speck of the sun, so to say!" Uncle cried in genuine delight. "Straight from town, are you?"

"What a queer lot! One might think they had been specially picked," I thought, without yet properly understanding all that I was witnessing, or suspecting that I myself may only have enlarged this queer collection by joining them.

V

YEZHEVIKIN

A little figure of a man walked, or rather squeezed himself, into the room (although the door was quite wide), and from the threshold began to bend and bow, grin and peer at everyone present with vast curiosity. He was a little old man with sly, quick eyes set in a pock-marked face, with fuzz round a large bald spot on his head, and a thin half-smile, half-sneer on his rather thick lips. His dress-coat was very shabby and looked as though it had been made for another man. One button hung on a thread, while two or three were missing. His broken boots and greasy cap were in keeping with the rest of his

wretched attire. In his hand he clutched a filthy checked cotton handkerchief, with which he mopped his perspiring forehead and temples. I noticed that the governess blushed slightly and darted a swift look at me. It even seemed to me that there was something proud and defiant in that look.

"Straight from town, dear sir and benefactor! Straight from there, my kind sir! I'll tell you everything, but first allow me to pay my respects," the newcomer said and made straight for the general's lady. He stopped halfway, however, and turned to Uncle again.

"You know my chief characteristic, my benefactor; I'm a scoundrel, a thorough scoundrel! The minute I come in, I begin to look for the most important person in the house, and bend my steps in her direction at once, thus craving her protection and indulgence from the outset. I'm a scoundrel, sir, a thorough scoundrel. Allow me, kind madam, Your Excellency, to kiss the sleeve of your dear gown, lest my lips sully Your Excellency's golden little hand."

To my surprise the general's lady gave him her hand quite graciously.

"And now my best greetings to you, our fair one," he bowed to Miss Perepelitsina. "There's nothing for it, madam, a scoundrel I am. It was established as long ago as 1841 that I was a scoundrel, when I was dismissed from the service, just at the time Valentin Ignatyich Tikhontsov was promoted to 'Your Honour': he became an assessor while I became a scoundrel. The Lord has made me so outspoken, that's why I admit everything. What can I do? I have tried living honestly, I have, but now I must try it differently. And here's Alexandra Yegorovna, our pretty, rosy apple," he said, going round the table and making his way to Sashenka. "Allow me to kiss your pretty frock; you smell of apples and other delicacies, young lady. My respects to the young gentleman: I've brought you a bow and arrow for your name's day, I spent all morning making it, my little ones helped; we'll try it anon. And when you grow up you will be an officer, and chop off a Turk's head. Tatyana Ivanovna—why, she's not here, our ben-

efactress, or I'd kiss her pretty frock too. Praskovya Ilyinishna, my dear, kind lady, I cannot get near you or I'd kiss your pretty foot, let alone your pretty hand—there! Anfisa Petrovna, allow me to pay you my deepest respects. Only this morning I sent up a prayer for you, our benefactress, weeping and praying to God on my bended knees for you and for your good son, that He may grant him every rank and talent; talent especially. And to Ivan Ivanich Mizinchikov, my humble respects. May God grant your every wish. Because there's no making out what your wishes are, you are so taciturn, sir. Good day, Nastenka, all my small fry send their love to you, they talk about you every day. And now, my deepest bow to the host. Yes, I've come from town, Your Honour, straight from town. And this must be your dear nephew, the one who was brought up in a learned faculty? My humble respects, sir: your hand, please."

Someone laughed. The old man was clearly playing the part of a self-appointed clown. His arrival cheered the gathering. He went up to almost everyone in turn, but the sarcasm of his remarks was lost on many of them. Only the governess, whom to my surprise he had called simply Nastenka, stood blushing and frowning. I made to pull my hand away; the old man had been waiting for that, it seemed.

"Why, I was only going to shake it, kind sir, with your permission, and not to kiss it. Did you think I was going to kiss it? Oh no, my dear sir, for the time being I shall only shake it. You must be taking me for the household clown, eh?" he said, looking at me mockingly.

"Why, n-no, why, I. . . ."

"You'd better not, kind sir. If I'm a clown, someone else here is something else perhaps. I'll have you respect me: I'm not such a scoundrel as you may think. On second thoughts, I am a clown as well perhaps. I am a slave, my wife is a slave, and, besides, we have to flatter this one and that one. It's the way it goes. You may gain something by it after all, even if it's only a trifling titbit for the kiddies. Sugar, don't spare the sugar, sugar all the way, it's good for your health! I'm telling

you this in confidence, my dear sir: it may come in useful to you one day. Fortune's played me false, kind sir, that's why I'm a clown."

"Ha-ha-ha! Oh, the naughty little man! He's always so amusing!" chirped Anfisa Petrovna.

"My dear, gracious lady, you know it's easier to live in this world if you're a fool! If I'd only known, I'd have enlisted among the fools in my very young days and perhaps I'd have been a wise man by now. But no, I wanted to be clever too early in life, and now I'm nothing but an old fool."

"Look here," Obnoskin interposed (he must have resented the remark about "talents"), lolling with pointed ease in his chair and examining the old man through his eyeglass as if he were some sort of insect, "look here . . . I keep forgetting your name . . . what is it again?"

"Ah, kind sir, my name is Yezhevikin if you wish, but what's the good? It's nine years that I've been out of a job, so I just live on according to the laws of nature. The number of children I have, it's a regular *Kholmsky Family*.* The saying is true in my case: herds owns the rich man, babes owns the poor."

"Oh yes, of course . . . herds . . . that's beside the point, however. Listen then: I've been wanting to ask you for a long time: why d'you dart a look over your shoulder when you walk into a room? It's very funny."

"Why do I? Because I always fancy there's someone behind me wanting to slap me down like a fly, which is why I look back, my kind sir. It's a monomaniac I've become, my kind sir."

Everyone laughed. The governess got up, made as if to leave, and then sat down again. Her face looked wan and distressed in spite of its bright blush.

"D'you know who he is, old chap?" my uncle whispered. "He's her father, you know."

I stared at Uncle wide-eyed. The name Yezhevikin had

* *Kholmsky Family*, a novel by D N. Begichev that ran into six books.

quite escaped my memory. I had been imagining myself a hero, dreaming all the way there about my prospective bride, building magnanimous plans for her, and in the meantime forgetting her name entirely, or to be more exact making no note of it from the outset.

"How come?" I whispered back. "But I thought she was an orphan."

"He's her father alright, old chap. And, d'you know, he's the noblest and most honest of men, doesn't even drink, but only acts the clown. He's terribly poor and has eight children, old chap. Nastenka's salary is all they live on. He was dismissed from the civil service for his sharp tongue. He comes here every week. Such a proud man, never accepts anything. I tried to give him something many a time, but he won't take it. He's an embittered character."

"Well, what's the news, Yevgraf Larionich, my friend?" Uncle asked, slapping him genially on the shoulder, on noticing that the suspicious old man was trying to catch our conversation.

"What news could I bring, my benefactor? Yesterday, Valentin Ignatyich sent in his report on Trishin's case. The man had a short weight of flour in his sacks. That's the same Trishin, madam, who puffs and blows when he looks at you. D'you remember him, perhaps? And so, Valentin Ignatyich writes about Trishin: 'Since the aforementioned Trishin has failed to guard the honour of his own niece (she eloped with an officer last year), could he be expected to safeguard government property?' That's precisely what he said in his report, I swear I'm not lying."

"For shame! The things you're saying!" cried Anfisa Petrovna.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly! Your tongue has run away with you, Yevgraf old chap," Uncle joined her. "Your tongue will be the ruin of you. You're a forthright man, honourable and decent, I can truly say that, but your tongue is venomous. And it does surprise me that you can't get on with them, they're simple, kind folk, I believe. . . ."

"Kind sir and benefactor! It *is* the simple folk I'm afraid of!" the old man cried with peculiar fervour.

I liked his answer. I quickly walked up to Yezhevikin and shook his hand firmly. Truth to tell, by demonstrating my sympathy for the old man, I wanted to make some sort of protest against everyone's attitude. And yet, who knows, perhaps I simply wanted to make a favourable impression on his daughter, Nastasya Yevgrafovna. But no good at all came of my gesture.

"Allow me to ask," I said, blushing as usual and speaking too quickly, "do you know anything about the Jesuits?"

"No, kind sir, I don't; I may have heard something ... but what can I know? Why?"

"I just ... I just wanted to say something while we were on the subject. However, remind me another time. And now please accept my assurances that I understand and ... appreciate...."

Hopelessly embarrassed, I gripped his hand again.

"I'll certainly remind you, kind sir, certainly. I'll write it down in letters of gold. Here, allow me, I'll make a knot to remind me."

He found a dry corner in his filthy, tobacco-stained handkerchief, and tied it into a knot.

"Yevgraf Larionich, here's your tea," said Praskovya Ilyinishna.

"Thank you, beautiful madam, thank you, that is beautiful princess, not madam! It's for the tea. I met Stepan Alexeich Bakhcheyev on my way here, madam. He was in such high spirits, he couldn't be jollier! I said to myself, can he be contemplating marriage perhaps? Flatter, flatter," he half-whispered walking past me with his cup, winking at me and wrinkling up his eyes. "And where is Foma Fomich, our most gracious benefactor? Won't he be coming in to tea?"

Uncle flinched as if he were stung, and glanced timidly at the general's lady.

"Why, I really don't know," he replied hesitantly, strangely embarrassed. "We asked him, but he ... I really don't know,

perhaps he's not in the mood for tea. I've already sent Vidoplyasov for him, but . . . perhaps I should go and ask him myself?"

"I went in to him just now," Yezhevikin said with an enigmatic inflection.

"Did you really?" Uncle cried in alarm. "What did he say?"

"I called on him first to pay my respects. He said he would have tea in solitude, and then he added that he could live on a dry crust of bread if need be, that's what he said."

These words seemed to strike terror into my uncle's heart.

"Why didn't you explain to him, Yevgraf Larionich, why didn't you tell him," Uncle said at last, gazing at the old man with anguish and reproach.

"I did, I did."

"Well?"

"He did not deign to reply for a long time. He was doing a problem in mathematics, working something out: it must have been a brain-racking problem. He drew a theorem: I saw it with my own eyes. I addressed him three times: he raised his head when I spoke for the fourth time and only seemed to see me then. 'No,' he said, 'I won't come, they have a *learned* gentleman there now, I'm hardly fit company for a luminary like that.' That's precisely how he put it, a luminary."

The old man gave me a sidelong, mocking look.

"I knew it!" Uncle cried, throwing out his hands. "That's just what I expected. You're the *learned* gentleman he means, Sergei, you know. Oh, what's to be done now?"

"I must say, Uncle," I replied, shrugging my shoulders with dignity, "that in my opinion his excuse is so laughable that it's not worth worrying about, and I'm really surprised at your anxiety."

"Oh, old chap, you don't understand a thing," he cried, waving the suggestion away.

"It's too late to worry now," Miss Perepelitsina suddenly put in, "since you were responsible for all this unpleasantness from the very first, Yegor Ilyich. It's no good crying over

spilt milk. If you had listened to your mamma in the first place, you wouldn't be crying now."

"But what have I done, Anna Nilovna? Have a heart!" Uncle said in a pleading voice as if he wanted a hearing.

"I do have a heart, Yegor Ilyich, but you are a selfish man who has no love for his mother, that's the whole trouble," Miss Perepelitsina replied with dignity. "Why could you not humour your mamma from the start? She is your mother, you know, I'm not one to dissemble. I'm a major's daughter myself, not just anybody. . . ."

It seemed to me that Miss Perepelitsina's sole reason for joining in the conversation was to announce to all of us and me, a newcomer, particularly, that she was a major's daughter herself and not just anybody.

"It's because he insults his own mother," the general's lady herself declared wrathfully at last.

"Mamma! Be merciful! In what way do I insult you?"

"By being gloomily selfish, my son," the general's lady continued, her agitation growing.

"Oh, Mamma! Mamma! Where's my gloomy selfishness?" Uncle cried, close to despair. "You've been angry with me for five days, five days on end, refusing to speak to me! And why? What for? Let them judge me, let the whole world judge me! Let them hear my defence too, at last! I have long kept silent, Mamma: you refused to hear me out; let people hear me out now. Anfisa Petrovna, Pavel Semyonich, dear Pavel Semyonich, Sergei, my friend, you are a newcomer, an onlooker, so to say, your judgement will be impartial."

"Stop, Yegor Ilyich, stop!" Anfisa Petrovna cried out. "You will be the death of your mamma."

"I shall not be the death of Mamma, Anfisa Petrovna, but here is my chest—stab it!" Uncle cried out, incensed to a passion, which sometimes happens to weak-willed men when driven to the extreme, although the fire of their passion is as long-lived as that of burning straw. "What I mean to say, Anfisa Petrovna, is that I would never insult anyone. I shall begin by saying that Foma Fomich is the most noble and honest of

men, and, besides, a man of rare excellence of character, but ... but he was unfair to me on this occasion."

"He was?" Obnoskin drawled, as though wishing to goad Uncle further.

"Pavel Semyonich, dear Pavel Semyonich, do you honestly believe that I'm an unfeeling block of wood, so to say? I do see, you know, I do understand, my heart weeps tears of understanding, so to say, that all these misunderstandings occur because *he* loves me too well. You may believe me or not, but he was unfair to me on this occasion, I swear he was. I'll tell you everything, Anfisa Petrovna. I want to give you the whole story clearly and in detail, so you may see what started it all and judge whether I fairly deserved Mamma's anger for displeasing Foma Fomich. Sergei, my dear, you hear me out too," he added, turning to me, which, as a matter of fact, he had been doing all through his speech as if he feared the other listeners and doubted their sympathy. "Hear me out too and decide: am I right or not. Now, you see, this is what started everything: a week ago, yes it was no more than a week—my old commander, General Russapetov with his wife and sister-in-law made a stop of a few days in our town on their way somewhere. I was overwhelmed. Eager not to miss the opportunity, I flew to pay my respects and to invite them to dinner. He promised to come if he could. He's the worthiest of men, I tell you, he simply shines with virtues and holds a very high position besides. He's provided for his sister-in-law generously; another orphaned girl he married off to a wonderful young man (he's a notary at Malinovo now; he's quite young still, but he has an all-round education so to say) —in short, a general among generals. Well, of course, there was a great fuss and bustle, *chefs,* fricassees and things; I sent for an orchestra from town. I was delighted, of course, and looked it. And Foma Fomich didn't like my being delighted and looking it. We were having dinner—I remember they were serving his favourite jelly with whipped cream—he did not say anything, and suddenly he flared up, 'They're slighting me, they're slighting me!'—'But who's slighting you, Foma Fo-

mich?' I said. 'You're setting me at nought now,' he says. 'You're busy with your generals; your generals mean more to you than I.' I'm telling all this briefly, of course, the very gist, so to say, but if you only knew what else he said. I was quite shaken. What could I do? I was downcast, naturally, shattered, so to say, as hopeful as a plucked chicken. The great day arrived at last. And then I received a message from the general, regretting he couldn't come; so he wasn't coming. I rushed to Foma. 'Foma,' I said, 'set your mind at rest, he's not coming.' And what do you think? He refused to forgive me, and that was that. 'I've been slighted, I've been slighted.' I tried this and that. 'No,' he said, 'go to your generals; your generals mean more to you than I; you've broken the ties of friendship.' Ah, my dear friend! I do understand why he's angry. I'm not an unfeeling block of wood, a goat, a parasite or anything like that. Why, it was his too great love for me, so to say, his jealousy that was prompting him—he told me so himself—he was jealous of the general, afraid of losing my friendship, and putting me to the test. He wanted to know what sacrifice I would make for him. 'No,' he says, 'I myself am a general as far as you are concerned, I myself am an 'Your Excellency' to you! I shan't be reconciled until you've given me proof of your respect for me.' 'What proof could I give you, Foma Fomich?' 'Just keep addressing me as Your Excellency all day long, that will be sufficient proof.' I was flabbergasted! Can you picture my astonishment? 'Let it be a lesson to you,' he says, 'to quell your admiration for generals in future, when there are others who may be worth all your generals put together.' And then I said to him, I confess I could not contain myself, 'Foma Fomich, is it conceivable? How could I possibly dare do that? Could I, do I have the right to promote you to general? Just think, who promotes people to generals? Now, how could I address you as Your Excellency? Why, it's an infringement, so to say, upon sublime rights! Why, a general is the pride of his country: a general fights, sheds his blood in honourable combat! So how could I address you as Your Excellency?' But he stood his ground and wouldn't be

moved. 'I'll do anything for you, Foma, anything you say. You told me to shave my side-burns because there was little patriotism in them, and I did, I winced but I shaved them. And what's more, I'll do anything you wish, only please don't insist on a general's rank.' 'No,' he says, 'I shall not become reconciled until you call me Your Excellency. It'll be good for your morals,' he says, 'it'll humble your spirit,' he says. And ever since then, for a whole week now, he hasn't been on speaking terms with me. He resents anyone who comes to the house. When he heard that you were a learned man—it's my fault, I blurted it out on the spur of the moment—he said he wouldn't remain in the house if you came in. 'In other words,' he says, 'you don't consider me a learned man any longer.' Oh, the trouble there'll be when he comes to hear about Korovkin! Tell me, judge for yourself, what have I done? Should I take it upon myself to address him as Your Excellency ? Isn't this state of affairs unbearable? Why did he have to drive poor Bakhcheyev away at dinner today? Granted Bakhcheyev did not invent astronomy: but then I did not invent astronomy either, and neither did you invent astronomy.... Then why, why?"

"Why? Because you're envious, Yegor, my son," the general's lady chanted again.

"Mamma!" Uncle cried in utter despair. "You'll drive me out of my mind! This is not you speaking, Mamma, you are repeating the words of others. You will soon be treating me not as your son but as a block of wood, a stone, a lamp-post!"

"Uncle, I happen to know," I broke in, quite overwhelmed by his story, "Bakhcheyev told me—I don't know of course if it's true or not—that Foma Fomich was jealous of Ilyusha having his name's day tomorrow, and insisted it was his own name's day as well. I confess this streak in his character amazed me so that I...."

"It's his birthday, old chap, it's his birthday and not his name's day," Uncle interrupted me with a rush of words. "He just worded it incorrectly, but it is true, it is his birthday tomorrow. The truth above all, old chap...."

"It is not his birthday at all!" Sashenka called out.

"What do you mean by saying it isn't his birthday?" cried Uncle, taken aback.

"It's not his birthday at all, Papa dear! You're simply saying something that's not true to deceive yourself and to please Foma Fomich. He had his birthday in March, remember we took that trip to the monastery just before, and he wouldn't let anyone have any peace in the carriage: he kept shouting that the cushion was *crushing* his side, and kept pinching everyone; he was so mean he pinched Auntie twice. And then when we came to wish him a happy birthday, he got angry because there were no camelias in the bouquet. 'I like camelias,' he said, 'because I have the taste of a society man, and you're grudging me a few flowers from the hot-house.' And he sulked and moped all day and wouldn't talk to us."

I believe that had a bomb exploded in the middle of the room it would have frightened and astounded everyone less than this open revolt—and on whose part? on the part of a little girl who was even forbidden to speak above a whisper in her grandmother's presence. The general's lady, mute with astonishment and fury, drew herself up to her full height and glared at her impudent granddaughter, hardly believing her eyes. Uncle was numb with fright.

"See how far she's allowed to go? She wants to be the death of her granny!" shrieked Miss Perepelitsina.

"Sashenka, Sashenka, think what you're saying! Sashenka, what's come over you?" cried Uncle, darting from one to the other, from his mamma to Sashenka, anxious to stop the girl from going on.

"I refuse to be silenced, Papa!" Sashenka shouted, her eyes blazing, suddenly jumping up from her chair and stamping her feet. "I refuse to be silenced! We've all stood too much from Foma Fomich, your nasty, horrid Foma Fomich! Because Foma Fomich will ruin all our lives, because everyone keeps telling him that he's so clever, so generous, so noble, so learned, a mixture of all the virtues, a sort of *pot-pourri*, and Foma Fomich, fool that he is, believes it's all true. All the sweet

dishes you've served him, anyone else would have been ashamed, but not Foma Fomich, he eats up everything that is placed before him and asks for more. You'll see, he'll eat all of us alive, and it's all Papa's fault. Horrid, horrid Foma Fomich, I'll tell him straight. I'm not afraid of anyone. He's stupid, peevish, slovenly, base, and cruel, he's a bully, a gossip, and a fibber. Oh, I'd send him about his business at once if I could, but Papa adores him, Papa is crazy over him!"

"Ah," cried the general's lady, swooning away on the sofa.

"Agafya Timofeyevna my dear, my angel!" screamed Anfisa Petrovna, "take my smelling salts! Water, water, quickly!"

"Water, water!" cried Uncle. "Mamma, Mamma, don't! Come, I beg you on my bended knees."

"You ought to be put on bread and water, locked in a dark room and kept there ... oh, you murderess!" Miss Perepelitsina, trembling with fury, hissed at Sashenka.

"Go on, put me on bread and water, I don't care!" screamed Sashenka in a sort of ecstasy. "I'm sticking up for Papa because he can't stick up for himself. Who is he, who is this Foma Fomich of yours compared to Papa? He eats Papa's food and then he goes and humiliates him, the ungrateful creature! Why, I'd tear him to pieces, that Foma Fomich of yours! I'd challenge him to a duel and kill him outright with two pistols."

"Sashenka, Sashenka!" came Uncle's desperate cry. "One more word and I'm doomed, doomed for ever!"

"Papa!" cried Sashenka, suddenly flying to her father and flinging her arms about him. Tears poured down her face. "Papa, why should you, so gentle, so wonderful, so jolly and so clever, doom yourself? Why should you take orders from that nasty, ungrateful man, be his toy, make a laughing-stock of yourself? Oh Papa, my precious darling Papa!"

She burst into sobs, buried her face in her hands and rushed out of the room.

A great to-do broke out. The general's lady lay in a faint. Uncle knelt beside her, kissing her hands. Miss Perepelitsina bustled about them, casting baleful but triumphant looks at

us. Anfisa Petrovna mopped her hostess's temples with water and fussed about with her smelling-salts. Praskovya Ilyinishna trembled, and wept copious tears. Yezhevikin looked for a corner to creep into, while the governess turned pale and seemed dazed with fear. Mizinchikov alone remained entirely unaffected. He got up, walked to the window, and stood peering outside, paying no attention whatsoever to the scene.

Suddenly, the general's lady raised herself, sat up straight, and measured me with a wrathful look.

"Out!" she cried, and stamped her foot.

I must confess that I expected this least of all.

"Out! Out of my house! Out! What's he doing here? Out he goes this instant! Out!"

"Mamma, Mamma! Why, Mamma, this is Sergei, you know," Uncle mumbled, shaking all over with fright. "Why, Mamma, he's come to stay with us."

"What Sergei? Rubbish! I refuse to listen—out! It's Korovkin. I'm certain it's Korovkin. I'm always right in my premonitions. He's come to drive Foma Fomich out: that's why he's been invited. My heart tells me this. Out, you blackguard!"

"Uncle," I said, choking with righteous indignation. "If that's how it is ... if that's how it is, then I ... you'll excuse me ..." I picked up my hat and turned to go.

"Sergei, Sergei, what are you doing? Oh, now it's this one! Mamma, it's Sergei, you know. Sergei, have a heart," he cried, running after me and trying to pull my hat away. "You're my guest, you're staying, I want you to. She doesn't mean it," he added in a whisper, "she's only like that when she's angry. Just hide somewhere until this blows over ... stay quietly somewhere, and everything will blow over. She'll forgive you, I assure you. She's kind, really, it's just her tongue running away with her. You see she says she thinks you're Korovkin, but she'll forgive you afterwards, I promise you she will.... What d'you want?" he shouted in a voice unsteady with fear to Gavrila who had just entered the room.

Gavrila was not alone: he was accompanied by a servant

boy, a youngster of sixteen or so, a very good-looking lad who, as I learnt afterwards, had been taken into the house service for his looks. His name was Falalei. He wore a strange sort of costume: a red silk shirt with a gold braid collar, a gold braid belt, black velveteen trousers, and kid boots lined with red, the tops turned down. This costume was an idea of the general's lady herself. The boy stood sobbing bitterly: tears were streaming down from his big blue eyes.

"What's this now?" Uncle cried. "What's happened? Speak up, you rascal, speak up!"

"We're here on Foma Fomich's orders: he's on his way down," Gavrila replied with a stricken air. "I'm to have my test and he...."

"What about him?"

"He's been dancing," Gavrila said mournfully.

"Dancing?" Uncle cried, appalled.

"Dan-cing," Falalei wailed through his sobs.

"The Komarinsky dance?"

"The Ko-ma-rinsky."

"And has Foma Fomich caught you?"

"He has!"

"They've finished me! I'm done for!" cried Uncle, clutching his head in both hands.

"Foma Fomich," announced Vidoplyasov, coming into the room.

The door opened and Foma Fomich in person appeared before the baffled company.

VI

ABOUT THE WHITE BULL AND THE KOMARINSKY MUZHIK

Before I have the honour of presenting Foma Fomich in person to the reader, I think it necessary to say a few words about Falalei and explain just what was so appalling about his doing the Komarinsky dance and Foma Fomich catching him when he was thus merrily engaged. Falalei was a servant

boy, orphaned in his infancy, and godson of my uncle's late wife. Uncle was very fond of him. This was sufficient reason for Foma Fomich, on settling down at Stepanchikovo and enslaving Uncle, to come to hate this favourite of his. The general's lady, however, had taken a peculiar fancy to the boy and, notwithstanding Foma Fomich's wrath, kept him upstairs in the family's service. The law was laid down by the general's lady herself in this case, and Foma gave in, storing the slight away in his heart—he took everything as a slight—and avenging himself on my perfectly innocent uncle for it whenever he had the chance. Falalei was extremely handsome. He had a girl's face, the face of a beauty, a village maiden. The general's lady pampered and made much of him, prizing him like a rare and pretty toy; it is difficult to say whom she loved best: her curly-haired lap-dog Ami or Falalei. I have already mentioned his costume, which was an idea of hers. The housemaids provided him with pomade, while Kuzma, the barber, had to wave his hair for him on holidays. The boy was a queer sort of creature. He could not be called an out-and-out idiot or a natural fool, but he was so naïve, so truthful and guileless, that at times he could really be taken for a simpleton. If he dreamt of anything he instantly went and told about it to his masters. He would break into his masters' conversation without the least concern. He told them things which should never be told to masters. He wept in all sincerity when his mistress swooned or when his master was scolded overmuch. He felt for anyone in adversity. He would sometimes come up to the general's lady, kiss her hands and beg her not to be angry, and the general's lady would graciously forgive him this audacity. He was sentimental to the extreme, as gentle as a little lamb, as jolly as a happy child. At table he was given titbits.

He invariably placed himself behind his mistress's chair, and was awfully fond of sugar. When he was given a lump he quickly crunched it between his strong, milk-white teeth, his merry blue eyes and the whole of his pretty face beaming with indescribable joy.

Foma Fomich nursed his resentment for a long while; seeing, however, that resentment would get him nowhere, he changed his attitude abruptly and became Falalei's benefactor. After scolding Uncle thoroughly for neglecting his servants' education, Foma Fomich immediately set out to teach the poor boy morals, good manners, and French. "Why!" he would defend his absurd idea (an idea occurring not only to Foma Fomich either, to which the writer of the present bears witness), "Why! He's always upstairs in the mistress's rooms; supposing she forgets that he knows no French, and tells him something like *donnez moi mon mouchoir,* it's up to him to be equal to the occasion, to please!" It transpired, however, that not only was it impossible to teach Falalei French, but that the *chef* Andron, his uncle, who had honestly tried to teach him to read and write in Russian, had long since given up the effort and put the reader away on the shelf. Falalei was so dull-witted where book learning was concerned that he simply could not grasp a thing. Moreover, trouble actually started because of it. Falalei was teased as "Frenchie" by the other servants, and Gavrila, Uncle's honoured valet, had the effrontery of overtly denying the good of studying French. Foma Fomich came to hear of it, and in his anger made Gavrila, the opponent himself, study French in punishment. This is how all this business of the French language, which had so angered Mr. Bakhcheyev, began. Matters were even worse when it came to comportment. Foma simply could not change Falalei's ways, and the boy, ignoring his ban, came and told him his dreams every morning, which practice Foma Fomich considered highly familiar and improper. But Falalei stubbornly remained Falalei. It goes without saying that Uncle bore the brunt of the blame for all this.

"Do you know what he did today?" Foma would shout, for greater effect choosing a moment when everyone was in the room. "Do you know, Colonel, what your systematic pampering has achieved? He gobbled up that piece of pie you gave him at dinner today, and do you know what he said after-

wards? Come here, come here, you ridiculous chap, come here, you idiot, you rosy mug!"

Falalei came up, whimpering and rubbing his eyes with both fists.

"What did you say after you gobbled up your pie? Repeat it for all to hear."

Falalei said nothing, and burst into bitter tears.

"Very well, I'll say it for you. You slapped your stuffed and indecent belly and said, 'I've guzzled myself on pie like Martin on soap!' But, Colonel, does one use such language in civilized society, in high society at that? Did you say that or not? Speak up!"

"Ye-es. . ." sobbed Falalei.

"Then tell me this: does Martin eat soap? Precisely where did you see a man called Martin who ate soap? Speak up! Give me some idea about this phenomenal Martin."

Silence.

"I am asking you," Foma persisted, "just who is this Martin? I want to see him, I want to meet him. Well, who is he? Is he a registry clerk, an astronomer, a village fool, a poet, a soldier, a servant—he must be somebody, you know. Speak up!"

"A ser-vant," Falalei brought out at last, still weeping.

"Whose servant? Who does he belong to?"

But Falalei could not name his masters. It ended, of course, with Foma rushing out of the room in a temper, shouting that he had been insulted, the general's lady starting a series of fainting fits, and Uncle cursing the day he was born, begging everyone's forgiveness, and spending the rest of the day treading on tiptoe in his own rooms.

To make matters worse, the very next day after the affair of Martin and the soap, Falalei, serving Foma his morning tea, and having entirely forgotten all about Martin and yesterday's unpleasantness, told him that he had a dream about a white bull. What next! Indignation swept over Foma Fomich, who immediately summoned Uncle and took him to task for the indecency of the dream seen by *his* Falalei. On this occasion, strict measures were taken: Falalei was punished: he had to

stand in a corner on his knees, and was strictly forbidden to see such coarse and ungentlemanly dreams again. "What makes me angry," Foma said, "apart from the fact that it should never even occur to him to dare and bother me with his dreams at all, dreams of white bulls particularly; apart from that, you must agree, Colonel, what is a white bull proof of if not your uncouth Falalei's coarseness, ignorance, and boorishness? His thoughts are like his dreams. Didn't I tell you from the very first that no good would come of him and that it was wrong to keep him upstairs as a personal servant? You shall never, never develop his senseless rustic soul into anything lofty or poetic. Couldn't you," he continued, turning to Falalei, "couldn't you dream of something graceful, gentle, ennobling, a polite society scene like gentlemen playing cards, or ladies strolling in a beautiful garden?" Falalei promised to dream of gentlemen or ladies strolling in a beautiful garden the very next night without fail.

Before going to sleep that night Falalei prayed for this in tears, and lay thinking for a long time of how to avoid dreaming of that cursed white bull. But a mortal's hopes are vain things. On awakening the next morning, he was horrified to remember that all night long he had been dreaming of nothing but the hateful white bull again, and had not seen a single lady strolling in a beautiful garden. The consequences on this occasion were extraordinary. Foma Fomich declared peremptorily that he refused to credit the repetition of this dream to chance, and that he suspected some member of the household, perhaps even the colonel himself, prompting Falalei to it in order to spite Foma Fomich. There was much shouting, rebuking, and weeping. The general's lady fell ill towards evening; the whole household was plunged into dejection. Their only remaining and frail hope was that surely the next night, that is, the third successive night, Falalei would dream of something gentlemanly. Imagine everyone's indignation when for a whole week running, every single night, Falalei dreamed of nothing but a white bull, nothing at all. It was futile expecting any polite society dreams from him.

But the most curious thing was that it never occurred to Falalei to lie about it: to simply say that it was not a white bull he had dreamed about but, say, a carriage full of ladies and Foma Fomich; especially since lying in an emergency such as this was not so very sinful really. But Falalei was so truthful that he simply could not tell a lie even if he wanted to. It was not even suggested to him. Everyone knew that he would betray himself the moment he spoke and Foma Fomich would instantly catch him telling a lie. What was to be done? Uncle's predicament was becoming unbearable, while Falalei was absolutely incorrigible. The poor boy actually began to lose flesh from worry. Malanya, the housekeeper, put it down to the evil eye, and sprinkled the boy with holy water. The tender-hearted Praskovya Ilyinishna also took part in this salutary operation. But even this did not help. Nothing could!

"Oh deuce take the damned thing," Falalei said. "Every single night I dream of it! I say a prayer every night before going to sleep: 'Please don't let me dream of the white bull, don't let me dream of the white bull.' But there he is, curse and blast him, that great big blunt-nosed bull with horns! Ugh!"

Uncle was in despair. Luckily, however, Foma Fomich seemed suddenly to forget about the white bull. No one, of course, believed that Foma Fomich was capable of forgetting so important a matter, and fearfully presumed that he was shelving the white bull only to bring it to the fore again at an opportune moment. It transpired later that Foma Fomich had been too busy to worry about the white bull just then; he had other matters and other worries on his mind; other plans were ripening in his fertile and hard-working brain. That is why Falalei was granted a reprieve. Everyone else breathed more freely together with Falalei. The boy cheered up and began to forget the recent trouble; the white bull, too, appeared less and less frequently in his dreams, though it did keep reminding the boy occasionally of its phantastic existence. In short, everything would have been well if there had been no Komarinsky dance in the world.

It must be said that Falalei was a splendid dancer: he had more aptitude for dancing than anything else. It was actually something like a calling; he danced with energy and inexhaustible gaiety, but what he liked particularly was the Komarinsky Muzhik dance. Not that he found any special appeal in this fickle muzhik's frivolous, or in any case inexplicable, deeds —no, he simply liked to dance the Komarinsky because hearing the music and not dancing to it was something he was simply incapable of. Sometimes, in the evening, a group of two or three valets, the coachmen, the gardener who played a fiddle, and even some of the ladies' maids, would gather in the farthest corner of the estate grounds, as far away from Foma Fomich as possible, and music and dancing would begin, with Komarinsky coming into its triumphant own towards the end. The orchestra comprised two balalaikas, a guitar, a fiddle, and a tambourine, excellently managed by Mitushka the post-boy. One should have seen Falalei then: he danced himself into complete oblivion and utter exhaustion, urged on by the shouts and laughter of his audience; he whooped shrilly, shouted, laughed, and clapped his hands; he danced as though a strange, indomitable force were driving him on, a force he was powerless against, and tapping his heels he stubbornly tried to catch up with the quickening time of the lilting tune. These were his moments of purest delight; and all this would have gone on well and happily had not rumour of the Komarinsky dance reached Foma Fomich at last.

Foma Fomich was appalled and instantly sent for the colonel.

"Colonel, there is only one thing I want you to tell me," Foma said, "have you sworn to ruin that poor idiot entirely or in part? In the former event I shall withdraw instantly, but in the latter, I...."

"Why, what is it? What's happened?" Uncle cried in alarm.

"What's happened you say? But don't you know that he's been dancing the Komarinsky?"

"Well ... well, what of it?"

"What of it, you say?" Foma shrieked. "And it's you who is saying it, you, his master and, I should even say, father, in a certain sense! After this I wonder if you can have a sound understanding of what the Komarinsky dance means. Are you aware that this song speaks of a loathsome muzhik committing a most immoral deed while drunk? Are you aware just what that lecherous serf attempted to outrage? He violated the most sacred of ties and trampled upon them, so to say, with his coarse muzhik boots, boots accustomed to trampling the floor in pot-houses. Do you or do you not realize that you have insulted my noblest feelings with your answer? Do you realize that you have personally insulted me with your answer? Do you realize it or not?"

"But Foma.... It's only a song, you know, Foma...."

"Only a song, you say! And you are shameless enough to admit to me that you know the song—you, a member of decent society, father of well-behaved, innocent children, and a colonel, besides! Only a song! But I am convinced that this song was written from real life. Only a song! But what respectable man would, without perishing from shame, admit that he knows this song, that he has ever heard this song, what man, what?"

"You for one know it, Foma, don't you, since you're asking this," my disconcerted Uncle replied in the simplicity of his heart.

"What! I know it? I ... I ... you mean, I know it? Oh, the insult of it," Foma screamed, leaping up from his chair and panting with fury. He had never expected a reply as staggering as this.

I shall not venture to describe Foma Fomich's wrath. The colonel was banished with ignominy from the sight of this champion of morals for the impropriety and *unresourcefulness* of his answer. That day, however, Foma Fomich swore he'd catch Falalei in the act of doing the Komarinsky. In the evenings, when everyone supposed he was busy with something, he would steal out of the house, make his way past the vegetable gardens and hide in the hemp,

whence he could watch the clearing where the dancing took place. He stalked poor Falalei the way a hunter stalks his prey, thinking with relish of the shake-up he would give the whole household, and the colonel especially. At last success came to crown his unremitting toils: he caught Falalei dancing the Komarinsky. No wonder, therefore, that Uncle was distraught when he saw Falalei in tears and heard Vidoplyasov announce Foma Fomich, who appeared before us in person so unexpectedly and at so disturbing a moment.

VII

FOMA FOMICH

I studied that gentleman with tense curiosity. Gavrila had justly called him a puny little man. Foma was short, with grey in his tow-coloured hair, a hooked nose, and a network of fine wrinkles over his whole face. On his chin he had a large wart. He was close on fifty. He walked slowly, with measured step, his eyes upon the ground. But his face and all his pedantic figure expressed self-assurance at its most impudent. To my amazement he appeared in a dressing-gown, of foreign cut it's true, but a dressing-gown all the same, and what was more, in bedroom slippers. The collar of his shirt, free of any cravat, was laid back *à l'enfant*, which gave Foma Fomich an exceptionally stupid look. He walked up to a vacant armchair, pushed it up to the table and sat down, without saying a word to anyone. In a flash there was no trace of the fuss and excitement of a minute ago. It grew so quiet that one could have heard a pin drop. The general's lady turned as meek as a lamb. All that poor idiot woman's slavish fondness for Foma Fomich was in evidence now. She could not look her fill at her treasure, and feasted her eyes on him. Miss Perepelitsina rubbed her hands and grinned, while poor Praskovya Ilyinishna noticeably shook with fright. Uncle at once began to fuss.

"His tea, sister dear, his tea! Put more sugar in it, sister dear: Foma Fomich likes his tea very sweet after his nap. You do want it sweet, don't you, Foma?"

"I can't be bothered with your tea now," Foma spoke slowly and gravely, waving the tea away with a preoccupied air. "All you think about is having things sweeter."

These words and Foma's entrance, perfectly ludicrous in its pedantic solemnity, made me curious to learn how far this conceited little gentleman would finally go in his impudence, to what forgetfulness of the decencies.

"Foma!" cried Uncle. "This is my nephew: Sergei Alexandrich! He's just arrived."

Foma Fomich measured him with a look from head to toe.

"It amazes me, Colonel, that you should find pleasure in interrupting me so systematically every time I speak," Foma said after a considerable silence, without taking the slightest notice of me. "You are spoken to on a serious matter, and there you go *discoursing* about heaven knows what. Have you seen Falalei?"

"I have, Foma."

"Oh, you have, have you! Very well, I'll show him to you once again since you *have* seen him. Take a look at your masterpiece . . . from the point of view of morals. Come here, you idiot! Come here, you Dutch mug! Come on, come on! Don't be afraid."

Falalei came up, whimpering with mouth wide open, and gulping down his tears. Foma Fomich looked at him and gloated.

"I have called him a Dutch mug intentionally, Pavel Semyonich," Foma remarked, sprawling in his armchair and half turning to Obnoskin who sat beside him. "Altogether, you know, I see no need to tone down my expressions under any circumstances. Truth must always remain the truth. And no matter what you drape filth in, filth it will always remain. Then why trouble to tone down your expressions? Just to deceive yourself and others? Only a stupid society noddle could have conceived the need for all these senseless decencies. Now

tell me—be the judge of this—do you find anything beautiful in this specimen before you? I mean anything noble, beautiful, and inspired, and not just a red mug?"

Foma Fomich spoke slowly and softly, with a regal sort of indifference.

"Beautiful in him?" Obnoskin replied with insolent carelessness. "I think it's simply a good piece of beef—nothing else."

"I stood in front of the mirror today and looked at myself," Foma went on with some solemnity. "Far be it from me to think myself handsome, but in spite of myself I came to the conclusion that there must be something in my grey eyes that sets me apart from one of those Falaleis. It's the thought, it's the life, it's the intelligence, in that eye. I'm not praising myself personally. I'm speaking of our class as a whole. And now tell me: d'you think there could be a shred, even a speck of a soul in this animated beefsteak? I beg you to observe, Pavel Semyonich, the repulsive freshness, the coarse and stupid freshness that invariably colours the faces of these *people*, utterly deprived of thought and ideals, and feeding on nothing but beef. Would it please you to know the level of his intelligence? Hey you, thing! come here, let us feast our eyes on you. Why d'you stand there gaping? D'you want to swallow a whale or something? Are you handsome? Answer me: are you handsome?"

"I'm hand-some!" Falalei replied through smothered sobs.

Obnoskin roared with laughter. I felt I was beginning to tremble with fury.

"Did you hear him?" Foma addressed Obnoskin triumphantly. "That's nothing yet! I've come here to test his knowledge. You see, Pavel Semyonich, there are certain people whose wish it is to corrupt and ruin this wretched idiot. I may be too stern a judge, I may be wrong, but my love of mankind bids me speak. He has just been dancing the most indecent of dances. No one here gives the matter a thought. But listen for yourself now. Answer me: what have you been doing just now? Answer me, speak up at once, d'you hear?"

"I was dan-cing. . ." spoke Falalei sobbing the louder.

"What were you dancing? What dance? Speak up, will you!"

"The Ko-ma-rinsky. . . ."

"The Komarinsky, you say! And just who is this Komarinsky? What is Komarinsky? Does an answer like yours tell me anything at all? Come now, give us some sort of idea: who is this Komarinsky of yours?"

"A mu-zhik."

"A muzhik? Simply a muzhik? Amazing! He must be a remarkable muzhik! He must be some famous muzhik if he has poems and dances composed about him. Answer me. Is he?"

Slow torture was one of Foma's delights. He played a cat-and-mouse game with his victim; but Falalei, unable to understand the question, whimpered and said nothing.

"Answer me!" Foma persisted. "I'm asking you: what sort of muzhik is he? Speak up! What sort of muzhik is he: private or state owned, free, bond, or monasterial? There are different muzhiks."

"Mo-na-sterial."

"Ah, a monasterial serf? Did you hear that, Pavel Semyonich? It's a new historical fact: the Komarinsky muzhik was a monasterial serf. Hm. And just what has this monasterial muzhik done? For what great deeds is he sung and . . . danced?"

It was a tricky question and since it was addressed to Falalei it was also dangerous.

"Now that's . . . rather . . ." Obnoskin opened his mouth to say upon glancing at his mamma who was beginning to fidget rather peculiarly on the sofa. But what could they do? Foma Fomich's whims were considered law.

"For heaven's sake, Uncle, if you don't hush that fool he'll. . . . See what he's driving at? Falalei is sure to say something silly," I whispered to Uncle who was so perplexed he did not know what to do.

"After all, Foma. . ." he began. "Look, I want to present my nephew to you, a young man who's studied mineralogy. . . ."

"I beg you, Colonel, not to interrupt me with this mineralogy of yours, a subject in which, as far as I know, you are a complete ignoramus, as are some *others* as well perhaps. I am not a child. I will have him answer me that this muzhik, instead of working for the good of his family, got drunk, pawned his sheepskin for drink at the pot-house, and ran, drunken, down the street. This, as we all know, is the gist of this poem extolling drunkenness. Rest assured that he knows what he should say *now*. Now then, answer me: what did that muzhik do? I've given you a hint, I've actually placed the words in your mouth. But I insist that you tell me yourself: what did he do, what was he famous for, what did he do to deserve such immortal glory that troubadours should be singing his praises? Well?"

Poor Falalei gazed about him in anguish; at a loss for words he kept opening and closing his mouth like a carp flung on to the sand.

"I'm ashamed to say it," he mumbled at last in utter despair.

"Aha! You're ashamed to say it!" Foma took up with an air of triumph. "This is the very answer I have been striving for, Colonel! You're ashamed to say it but you're not ashamed to do it, are you? Such are the morals which you have sown, Colonel, which have sprouted and which you are now . . . watering. But why waste words? Go into the kitchen now, Falalei. With all due respect for those present I shall say nothing to you at the moment; but I shall have you cruelly and painfully punished later on today, this very day. If you are not, if I am betrayed for your sake once again, then stay here and comfort your masters with your Komarinsky, while I shall depart this house forthwith. Enough! I have spoken. Go!"

"Oh really, you were a bit severe, you know . . ." Obnoskin mumbled.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly!" Uncle cried, but catching Foma's lowering look he broke off and fell silent.

"It amazes me, Pavel Semyonich," Foma went on, "what can all these modern writers, poets, scholars, and philosophers be about? How can they remain indifferent to the sort of songs the Russian people are singing and the songs the Russian people are dancing to? What then have all these Pushkins, Lermontovs, and Borozdnas* been about until now? It amazes me! The people are dancing the Komarinsky, that apotheosis of drunkenness, while they sing praises to some wretched forget-me-nots! Why don't they give up their silly forget-me-nots and write some decent songs for popular usage? It's a social problem. Let them write about a muzhik if they must, but let it be an ennobled muzhik so to say, a villager and not a muzhik. Let them portray this village sage in all his simplicity, bast-shoes and all—even this I am willing to admit—but a man imbued with virtues which could be the envy of—I say this without demur—one of those overcelebrated Alexanders of Macedon or someone. I know Russia and Russia knows me: that's why I'm saying this. Let them portray this muzhik burdened by years and a large family, perhaps, in a stuffy hut, actually hungry perhaps, but content and unrepining, blessing his poverty and indifferent to the rich man's gold. Let the rich man himself be moved to bring him his gold as a gift; and in this case let them even show the virtues of a muzhik uniting with the virtues of his master, perhaps even a grand gentleman. A villager and a grand gentleman, worlds apart socially, united at last through their virtues—it's a noble thought! And what do we see? Silly forget-me-nots on the one hand, and on the other a dishevelled drunken man jumping out of a pot-house and rushing down the street. Now tell me, is there anything poetical in this? Anything to admire? Where's the wisdom, the grace, the morals in this? It baffles me."

"Foma Fomich, I owe you a hundred rubles for these words of yours!" Yezhevikin said with a look of admiration.

* I. P. Borozdna, a little-known poet of no great talent.

"The devil he'll get it from me," he whispered to me furtively. "Flatter, flatter, flatter!"

"Yes, of course, it was well put," Obnoskin said.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly!" cried Uncle, who had been listening to Foma with profound attention and watching me triumphantly.

"What a subject for discussion!" he said to me in an undertone, rubbing his hands. "A many-sided conversation, dash it! Foma Fomich, this is my nephew," he added, overwhelmed. "He has also studied literature, allow me!"

Once again Foma Fomich took not the slightest notice of Uncle's introduction.

"For God's sake, don't present me any more. I beg you earnestly," I whispered to Uncle with a look of determination.

"Ivan Ivanich," Foma suddenly addressed Mizinchikov with a hard stare at him, "you heard us talking now: what is your opinion?"

"Mine? Are you asking me?" Mizinchikov asked in surprise as if he had just been startled awake.

"Yes, you. I'm asking you because I esteem the opinion of truly clever people and not of those problematical sages whose only claims to wisdom are that they are *persistently being presented* as sages and *scholars,* and who are sometimes expressly sent for in order to show them off in a circus or places like that."

The barb was aimed directly at me. And yet there was no doubt that while ignoring me completely Foma Fomich had started all that talk on literature for the sole purpose of dazzling, crushing, and annihilating a St. Petersburg scholar and would-be sage. I, for one, did not doubt it for a moment.

"If you want to know my opinion, it's . . . it's in agreement with your opinion," Mizinchikov replied spiritlessly and reluctantly.

"You're for ever agreeing with me! It's making me quite sick," Foma said. "I'll tell you frankly, Pavel Semyonich," he addressed Obnoskin again after a pause, "if there's anything I respect the immortal Karamzin for it's not his history, or his

Marfa Posadnitsa, or his *Russia Old and New,* but simply and solely for his *Frol Silin*: it's a noble epic! It's purely national in character and will live for now and for ever! It's epic at its noblest!"

"Exactly, exactly, exactly, a noble *epoch*! Frol Silin was a virtuous man. I remember, I've read it: remember how he bought out the two wenches and then gazed up at the sky and wept! Noble of him!" Uncle put in, beaming with pleasure.

Poor Uncle! He could never resist meddling in a *scholarly* conversation. Foma smiled with malice but said nothing.

"Some of the modern books are entertaining too," Anfisa Petrovna said warily. "Take the *Mysteries of Brussels*, for instance."

"I wouldn't say that," Foma remarked with something like regret. "I read one of the new poems the other day. What can I say! Just forget-me-nots! If you want to know my opinion, of the youngest writers I like *Scribe* best, a facile pen."

"Oh, *Scribe*!" cried Anfisa Petrovna. "Is that the one who writes letters to the magazine? Oh, it's delightful! Such a marvellous play on words!"

"Exactly, a play on words. He plays with his pen, so to say. An unusually facile pen."

"Yes, but he's a pedant," Obnoskin remarked casually.

"Oh he is a pedant, I shan't argue against that: but he's a nice pedant, an elegant pedant. None of his ideas could withstand trenchant criticism of course; but the facility of his pen carries you away. He's a windbag, I agree; but a nice windbag, an elegant windbag. D'you remember, for instance, the announcement he made in a literary article that he had some estates of his own?"

"Estates? that's good!" Uncle took up happily. "In what gubernia?"

Foma paused, gave Uncle an intent look, and carried on in the same tone:

"Now tell me for reason's sake: why need I, a reader, know that he owns estates? If he does—my heartiest congratula-

tions. But how nicely, how humorously it's all described. His wit is dazzling, it's sparkling, he's seething with it! He's a bubbling spring of wit! Yes, that's the way to write. I think that if I agreed to write for the magazines, that's precisely the way I should write."

"Even better perhaps," Yezhevikin remarked deferentially.

"There's actually something melodious in the style," Uncle offered.

This was too much for Foma Fomich.

"Colonel," he said, "may I request you, with all due respect of course, not to interfere and to allow us to finish our conversation in peace. You cannot voice an opinion in our conversation, you cannot! So pray, do not disrupt our pleasant literary conversation. Manage your estate, drink your tea, but ... leave literature alone. It will not be the loser for it, I assure you."

This was carrying insolence much too far. I did not know what to think.

"Why, you said so yourself, Foma, that it was melodious," my embarrassed uncle brought out sadly.

"Granted. But I knew what I was talking about, I spoke to the point, and you?"

"Yes, sir, we used our brains when we talked about it," Yezhevikin said facetiously, bowing and scraping before Foma Fomich. "The brains we have are nothing to speak of, we have to go borrowing for more, there's just enough for a ministry or two perhaps, and if we have to take a third one on, we'll manage somehow—that's the sort of brains we have!"

"Oh, well, that means I've said something silly again," Uncle concluded and smiled his good-natured smile.

"You do admit it at least," Foma observed.

"It's all right, Foma, it's all right, I don't mind. I know that you're pulling me up like one of the family, like a brother. I've allowed you to do it myself, I've actually asked you to. It was to the point, it was for my own good. I'm grateful and I'll bear it in mind."

My patience was wearing thin. All the things I knew about Foma Fomich by hearsay had seemed somewhat exaggerated to me until then. But now that I saw it all with my own eyes, the way it really was, my astonishment knew no bounds. I could hardly believe my senses: I could not reconcile myself to this insolence, this impudent self-assertion on the one hand, and such voluntary enslavement, such credulous good nature on the other. Incidentally, Uncle too was abashed by such insolence. It was obvious. I was dying to challenge Foma, to come to verbal blows with him, to say something rude and really cutting to him—and after that, come what may! The thought inspired me. I watched for an opening and in my impatience tore the rim of my hat to pieces. But the opening eluded me: Foma deliberately refused to notice me.

"It's true what you say, too true, Foma," Uncle said, trying his hardest to pull himself together and do something to smooth over the unpleasantness of the remarks exchanged. "You've hit it right on the nail, Foma, thank you. One should first know one's business and only then start discoursing on it. It's all my fault! I've often found myself in similar straits before. Just think of it, Sergei, I was actually an examiner once. You're laughing! But there it is! Upon my word I was, truly! I was invited to attend an exam at a certain establishment, and they went and seated me among the examiners, just as a gesture of respect, for they had a vacant seat. And d'you know, I'll tell you frankly, I was quite frightened, a funny sort of panic came over me: there wasn't a single subject I knew! What was I to do! There, I thought, they'll be dragging me to the blackboard next. But everything went off well in the end; I actually asked them questions too, I asked them who was Noah. On the whole they answered excellently; after that we had lunch and drank champagne to the school's prosperity. A splendid establishment."

Foma Fomich and Obnoskin roared with laughter.

"I, too, laughed about it afterwards," Uncle cried, laughing good-naturedly, delighted that everyone was amused. "Here, Foma, whether you like it or not, I'll make all of you laugh,

I'll tell you how I put my foot in it once. Imagine, Sergei, we were stationed at Krasnogorsk. . . ."

"Allow me to ask, Colonel: will you be long with your story?" Foma broke in.

"Oh, Foma! But it's a wonderful story, you'll split your sides laughing. You just listen, it's good, I swear it's good. I'll tell you how I put my foot in it."

"I always listen to your stories with pleasure, when they're of this sort," Obnoskin drawled yawning.

"We'll have to listen, there's nothing for it," Foma decided.

"But I swear it's going to be good, Foma. I want to tell you about the way I put my foot in it once, Anfisa Petrovna. You listen too, Sergei: it's rather instructive. Well, we were stationed at Krasnogorsk (Uncle began, beaming with pleasure, in a hasty rush of words, his narrative abounding in parentheses, which was always the way when he tried to entertain his listeners with a story). No sooner had we arrived than I took myself off to the theatre that same evening. There was a wonderful actress, Kuropatkina: she eloped with the cavalry captain Zverkov, you know, in the middle of a play, and so the curtain simply had to go down. I mean to say that Zverkov chap was the very devil, who'd never refuse a drink or a game of cards, not that he was a drunkard, no, he simply believed in good companionship. But when he had one of his real drinking bouts he'd forget everything: where he lived, in what country, his own name too, in short, absolutely everything; but actually he was one of the best fellows in the world. Well then, there I was, watching the play. I left my seat during the interval and suddenly came face to face with my old friend Kornoukhov. . . . A matchless fellow, I'll tell you. It's true we haven't seen each other for about six years now. He's a campaigner, with no end of decorations; someone told me a while ago that he's already a councillor of state; he's gone into the civil service and now holds a high rank. We were both delighted of course. We spoke of this and that. In the box next to ours sat three ladies: the one on the extreme left was the ugliest horror the world has ever seen. I learnt afterwards that

she was a most worthy woman, mother of a family, an honour to her husband. Well then, fool that I am, I went and blurted out to Kornoukhov, 'Tell me, old chap, d'you happen to know who's that scarecrow over there?' 'Whic.. one?' 'That one.' 'Why, that's my cousin.' Oh, dash it! You can imagine how I felt. To correct matters I said, 'No, not that one. Your eyesight is really poor! The one on the other side, who is she?' 'It's my sister.' Oh, damn it! To make matters worse his sister was the sweetest little rose bud, and so dressed up: brooches and gloves and bracelets and things—in a word she was a perfect cherub; she married Pykhtin afterwards, an excellent chap; she eloped with him—they married without their parents' blessing: but everything is right and proper now: they're very well off too, and their fathers couldn't be happier. To continue. 'No, no,' I cried wishing I were dead, 'not that one!' 'D'you mean the one in the middle?' 'That's right, in the middle.' 'That one, old chap, is my wife.' Between you and me, that little charmer was good enough to eat! I mean to say she was so sweet you could just swallow her whole. 'Well,' I said, 'have you ever seen a bigger fool? Here's the biggest fool before you now: chop off his head, have no pity.' He laughed. He presented me to the ladies after the play and he must have told them about it, the rascal, because they did laugh a lot. And I must confess that I'd never had such a jolly time before. So you see, Foma old chap, how one can put one's foot in it. Ha-ha-ha!"

But my poor uncle's merriment was wasted. In vain he ran his cheerful and kindly eye over the company: a dead silence was the response to his cheerful story. Foma Fomich sat plunged in gloomy silence, and everyone followed his lead. Obnoskin alone wore a thin smile, foretasting the trouble Uncle was in for. Uncle blushed in embarrassment. That's just what Foma wanted.

"Have you finished?" he asked at last, addressing the embarrassed story-teller solemnly.

"I have, Foma."

"And are you glad?"

"Why glad, Foma, what do you mean?" poor Uncle replied dejectedly.

"D'you feel better now? Are you glad that you have disrupted a pleasant literary conversation between friends by breaking in and thus gratifying your petty vanity?"

"Come, come, Foma! I told it for the amusement of all of you and you...."

"Amusement did you say?" Foma cried, suddenly flaring up. "You are only capable of boring people, never amusing them. Amusement indeed! Are you aware that your story was almost immoral? I need not say it was indecent—that's self-evident. You have just declared, with a rare coarseness of feeling, that you made a mock of innocence, of a worthy noblewoman, merely because she did not have the honour of catching your fancy. And then you wanted us to laugh, that is support you and approve of you, approve of your coarse and indecent behaviour, and all because you are the master of this house. I'll say this, Colonel: you may find any number of toadies, lickspittles, and companions, you may even import them from distant lands and so increase your retinue in size to the detriment of forthrightness and outspoken noble-mindedness, but never will Foma Opiskin become either a flatterer, a lickspittle, or a toady of yours! You may take my word for that, if for nothing else!"

"Oh, Foma! You have misunderstood me, Foma."

"No, Colonel, I saw through you long ago, I understand you thoroughly. You are devoured by pride that knows no measure; you make pretence to unattainable perfection of wit, forgetting that pretentiousness blunts wit. You...."

"Oh, come now, Foma, for heaven's sake! Have some shame, we're not alone."

"But it is sad to see all this, Colonel, and having seen it one cannot remain silent. I am poor, I am *staying* at your mother's. People might think I am trying to flatter you if I say nothing. And I refuse to have any *unfledged youth* taking me for a toady of yours. When I came in here earlier, I may have intentionally stressed my truthful outspokenness; I may

have been obliged to be intentionally rude, for the very reason that it is you who put me in this position. You are too arrogant with me, Colonel, I may be taken for your slave, your toady. It gives you pleasure to humiliate me before *strangers*, whereas I am your equal, d'you hear me? Your equal in every respect. Perhaps *I* am doing you a favour by staying with you, and not *you* doing a favour to me. I am being humiliated: it follows that I have to praise myself, it's only natural. I cannot help saying it, I must say it, I must make my objection at once, and so I must declare to you, plainly and simply, that you are monstrously envious. For instance, if someone in an informal friendly conversation happens to show that he has knowledge, taste, and is well read, it's enough to set you off; it annoys you, and you think: 'You just wait, I, too, will show you my knowledge and taste.' And what taste have you, permit me to ask? When it comes to anything refined, you are as good a judge of it as a—forgive me, Colonel—as a bull is of beef, for example. I admit this is too harsh, too rude, but at least it's straightforward and just. That's something you'll never hear from your flatterers, Colonel."

"Ah, Foma!"

"That's right: 'Ah, Foma.' Truth is not like a feather-bed, I see. Very well then: we'll return to the subject later, but now, with your permission, I should like to amuse the party a little too. After all, you can't expect to shine all alone. Pavel Semyonich, have you ever seen a sea monster in human guise? I've been watching it for a long time. Take a good look at it: it does want to devour me, to eat me alive, to swallow me whole, doesn't it?"

He meant Gavrila. The old servant stood close to the door and he really did look mournful watching his master being hauled over the coals.

"I, too, want to entertain you with a bit of comedy, Pavel Semyonich. Hey you, old crow, come here! Do us the honour of coming closer, Gavrila Ignatyich! This is Gavrila, Pavel Semyonich: as a punishment for his rudeness he is learning

French. Like Orpheus I strive to mitigate the local manners not with song, however, but with the French language. Well, you Frenchman, *monsieur chematon**—he hates to be called *monsieur chematon,* you know—have you learned your lesson?"

"By heart," Gavrila replied with drooping head.

"Tell me, parlay voo fransay?"

"OO-ee, mossyou, jelly parlun pu."

I don't know why—was it because Gavrila looked so woebegone when he tried to articulate the French sentence, or was it because everyone had guessed Foma's wish to draw laughter from all of them—but everyone just roared with laughter the moment Gavrila uttered the first sounds. Even the general's lady was gracious enough to laugh. Anfisa Petrovna, flopping back on the sofa, shrilled and squealed, hiding her face behind her fan. They thought it funniest when Gavrila, on seeing what the test had turned into, lost patience, spat in disgust, and said reproachfully:

"The shame I lived to suffer in my old age!"

Foma Fomich was on the alert at once.

"What? What did you say? Impudent, are you?"

"No, Foma Fomich," Gavrila spoke with dignity. "There's no impudence in my words, and it's not for a serf like me to be impudent in the presence of a born gentleman like you. But every man wears God's image, His image and likeness. I'm already in my sixty-third year now. My father remembers that fiend Pugachev,** and my grandfather got hanged on the same tree by Pugachev as his master, Matvei Nikitich, God rest his soul, for which my father was honoured by his late master Afanasy Matveich above all others: he was a valet and ended his days as a butler. And as for me, Foma Fomich, sir, though I am a serf I've never been put to such shame as this in my life."

* *Chematon* is period Russian for "a fussy person."

** Yemelyan Pugachev (1742-75), the leader of the biggest peasant uprising in Russia. Even in the middle of the 19th century the nobility still pronounced his name with awe.

With the last words Gavrila spread out his hands and dropped his head. Uncle watched him uneasily.

"Enough, enough now, Gavrila!" he cried. "You've said enough, come now."

"Never mind, never mind," Foma said, paling slightly and grinning with the strain he was labouring under. "Let him speak his mind: it's all your handiwork you know."

"I'll say everything," Gavrila went on with extraordinary animation. "I'll hold nothing back. They may tie my hands, but they can't tie my tongue. Poor wretch that I am compared to you, Foma Fomich, a serf I am, that's all, but it hurts even me. To serve you and scrape before you is my duty always, because I was born a slave and must never forget to fear and obey my betters. When you sit down to write a book it's my duty to see that no one who has no business with you disturbs you. That's what I'm there for. If there's any service you want me to do, I'll do it with all my pleasure. But making me gabble in some outlandish tongue in my old age and putting me to shame before people! I can't go into the servants' hall now. 'Frenchie, Frenchie, you're a Frenchie, they say!' They all tease me. No, Foma Fomich, sir, I'm not the only fool, good folk too have started saying the same thing that you've become a properly cruel man, and that our master is like a young child in your hands; that a general's son though you may be by birth, and you yourself may be just short of a general's rank in service, you are so cruel the way you are now, you must be a real fiend."

Gavrila had had his say. I was beside myself with joy. Foma sat pale with anger amid the general confusion, unable, it seemed, to recover from the shock of Gavrila's attack; he seemed to be making up his mind how angry he should get. At last came the explosion.

"What! He dares abuse me—me? But it's open revolt!" Foma screeched and leapt up from the chair.

The general's lady jumped to her feet too and threw up her hands. A commotion broke out. Uncle dashed forward to push Gavrila, the criminal, out of the door.

"Put him in chains! in chains!' shrieked the general's lady. "To the town with him at once, into the army with him, Yegor! If you don't, I'll never bless you. Put him in stocks at once and send him into the army."

"What," raged Foma, "a slave, a boor, a menial daring to abuse me! A rag to wipe my boots on, he dared to call me a fiend!"

I stepped forward with extraordinary determination.

"I confess that in this case I agree entirely with Gavrila's opinion," I said, looking Foma Fomich straight in the eyes and trembling with excitement.

He was so taken aback by this sally of mine that at first he seemed unable to believe his own ears.

"What may this be?"he flared up at last turning on me in a frenzy and riveting me with his small, bloodshot eyes. "And who are you?"

"Foma Fomich," mumbled Uncle, completely flustered, "it's Sergei, my nephew."

"The scholar!" bellowed Foma. "So he's the scholar, is he? *Liberté-égalité-fraternité! Journal de Debats.* Oh no, young man, oh no! This is not St. Petersburg for you, you won't deceive us here. And I spit on your *de Debats* anyway. You call it *debats* and here we just say 'bah!' Scholar, indeed! Why, I've forgotten seven times what you've ever learnt—that's the sort of scholar you are."

I believe he would have attacked me with his fists if people had not held him back.

"Why, he's drunk," I said, looking about me in puzzlement.

"Who? Me?" Foma shrieked in a strange voice.

"Yes, you."

"Drunk?"

"Yes, drunk."

That was more than Foma could stand. Squealing as if his throat were being cut, he rushed out of the room. The general's lady was about to collapse in a swoon, but thought better of it and ran after Foma Fomich. Everyone ran after her, and Uncle ran after everyone else. When I came to and looked

about me, there was no one in the room but Yezhevikin. He was smiling and rubbing his hands complacently.

"Remember, the Jesuit you promised to tell me about?" he asked ingratiatingly.

"What?" I said, missing his meaning.

"You promised to tell me about that Jesuit earlier . . . a little story it was. . . ."

I rushed out of the room, across the terrace, and then into the garden. My head was in a whirl.

VIII

DECLARATION OF LOVE

I wandered about the garden for about a quarter of an hour, agitated and highly displeased with myself, trying to decide what to do next. The sun was setting. Suddenly, as I turned into a shady walk I came up face to face with Nastenka. Her eyes were filled with tears, and she was wiping them away with a handkerchief.

"I've been looking for you," she said.

"And I for you," I said. "Tell me, is this or is this not a madhouse?"

"It's not a madhouse at all," she said resentfully with a hard look at me.

"But if it's not, what does it all mean? For Christ's sake, give me some sort of advice. Where has Uncle gone now? May I go back? I'm awfully glad I met you, perhaps you'll tell me what to do."

"No, you'd better not go back. I, too, have left them."

"But where are they?"

"Who knows? They may have taken to the kitchen-garden again," she said irritably.

"Why kitchen-garden?"

"One day last week Foma Fomich cried out that he refused to stay in the house any longer and suddenly rushed out into the kitchen-garden, took a spade from the tool shed and be-

gan digging. We all wondered if he had gone mad perhaps. 'There,' he said, 'they shan't be able to reproach me with the food I've eaten here; I'll till the ground to pay for what I've eaten here, and then I'll leave. That's what I've been driven to!' And everyone wept at this and all but knelt before him, trying to take the spade away from him; but he went on digging, and all he did was dig up all the turnips. They let him have his way that time, and so he's probably doing it again. He's quite capable of it."

"And you... you're telling me all this so calmly!" I cried, seething with indignation.

She flashed an angry look at me.

"Forgive me, I hardly know what I'm saying. Now tell me, do you know the reason for my coming here?"

"N-no," she replied, blushing, and some oppressive thought shadowed her sweet face.

"You must forgive me," I continued. "I am upset, I know that this is not the way to speak about it, to you especially. But come what may. I believe that frankness is best in a case like this. I confess... or rather I wanted to say... do you know Uncle's intentions? He told me to seek your hand."

"Oh what nonsense! Don't talk about it, please," she hastened to cut me short and blushed crimson.

I was puzzled.

"Why nonsense? He wrote to me, you know."

"So he did write to you?" she said quickly. "Oh, how could he! And he promised me he wouldn't. What nonsense! Lord, what nonsense!"

"Forgive me," I mumbled not knowing what to say. "It was inconsiderate or rude of me perhaps... but the circumstances! Just think: we are surrounded by heaven knows what!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't apologize! Believe me that it only makes things worse, and yet I, too, have been wanting to talk to you and find out what you know.... Ah, how vexing it all is! So he did write to you after all! I was really afraid he would. Oh Lord, what kind of a man is he? And you went

and believed him and came dashing here at breakneck speed? What next!"

She did not conceal her annoyance. My position was not very enviable.

"I confess, this turn of events is quite unexpected," I said in utter confusion, "on the contrary, I thought. . . ."

"You did, did you?" she said with a shade of irony and bit her lip. "You know what, show me the letter he wrote you."

"Very well."

"Please don't be angry with me, don't take offence, I've troubles enough as it is," she said pleadingly, and yet a fleeting smile of mockery touched her pretty lips.

"Oh, please don't take me for a fool!" I cried angrily. "But perhaps you have something against me? Perhaps someone has brought you tales about me? Or is it because of my behaviour in the drawing room just now? But that's nothing, I assure you. It doesn't matter, honestly. I fully realize what a fool I must look to you now. Please don't laugh at me. I don't know what I'm saying. And it's all because I'm twenty-two, dash it."

"Good Lord, so what?"

"What do you mean, so what? Why, a man of twenty-two has it written all over him; the way it was with me, for instance, when I jumped out into the middle of the room at tea, or when I stand before you now. It's an awful age."

"Oh no, no," Nastenka said, struggling to control her laughter. "I'm sure you are kind and nice and clever, and truly I'm saying this to you in all sincerity. You're only too proud. But it's not too late to get over it."

"I don't think I'm overproud."

"Oh yes, you are. Remember how embarrassed you were, and why? Just because you tripped over the threshold! What right had you to ridicule your kind, your generous uncle who has done so much for you? Why did you want to make him the laughing-stock when it was you who were funny? It was bad of you, for shame! It doesn't do you credit, and I confess I was quite disgusted with you, so there!"

"You're right! I was an ass, more than that I behaved like a cad. You saw it, and this is punishment enough. Scold me, laugh at me, but hear me out: perhaps you will think differently of me," I said, carried away by some strange emotion, "you hardly know me now, but later when you come to know me better.... perhaps...."

"For heaven's sake, let's drop this conversation," Nastenka cried with unconcealed impatience.

"Very well, very well, let's drop it. But where may I see you again?"

"Why, what for?"

"But surely it can't be that we'll never talk again Nastasya Yevgrafovna. I beg you, name a rendezvous, today if you like. However, it's growing dark already. Tomorrow morning then if you possibly can; I'll get them to wake me up early. You know there's that arbour near the pond. I haven't forgotten where it is; I'll find the way. I lived here when I was a little boy, you know."

"A rendezvous? But what for? Aren't we talking to one another now?"

"But I don't know anything yet, Nastasya Yevgrafovna. I'll find out everything from Uncle first. After all, he's got to explain it all to me at last, and then I may be able to tell you something very important."

"No, no! Don't, don't!" cried Nastenka. "Let's put a stop to it right now and never bring it up again. Don't waste your time going to that arbour: I assure you I shan't come, and don't dwell on all this nonsense any longer, I beg you earnestly."

"In other words, Uncle has behaved like a madman towards me!" I cried in a fit of unbearable distress. "Why did he send for me then? Listen, what's that noise?"

We were close to the house. Shrill squeals and queer shouts came from the open windows.

"Oh heavens," she said turning pale. "Again! I knew it!"

"You did? One more question, Nastasya Yevgrafovna. I haven't any right, of course, but I venture to ask you this last

question for the sake of all of us. Tell me, and the secret will die with me, tell me frankly: is Uncle in love with you?"

"Oh dear! Rid your mind of this silly notion once and for all!" she cried, flushing angrily. "You're a good one, too. If he were in love with me, he wouldn't want me to marry you," she added with a bitter smile. "And where did you get the notion, where? Can't you understand what the trouble is? D'you hear those shouts?"

"Yes, but that's Foma Fomich."

"Of course it's Foma Fomich, but it's me they're shouting about now, because they keep saying the same silly thing you've just said: they also suspect him of being in love with me. They want him to marry someone else, and since I'm a poor nobody, and since sullying my honour is a trifling matter to them, they want him to send me packing, back to my father, as a safety measure. And whenever they say this to him he loses his temper, and even gets furious with Foma Fomich. It's what they are shouting about now, I can just feel it is."

"Then it's all true! Then he really does mean to marry that Tatyana woman?"

"What Tatyana?"

"Why, that fool of a woman."

"She's not a fool at all! She has a kind heart. You have no right to say that of her. She has a noble heart, a nobler heart than many others have. She can't be blamed for being unfortunate."

"May I interrupt? Granted that you are perfectly right about this, but are you not mistaken in the main thing? Why then, as I have noticed, do they receive your father so affably? If they were as much against you as you've just told me and wanted to drive you out of the house, they would have been against him too and would have given him a different welcome, woudn't they?"

"But can't you see what my father is doing for me? He acts the clown for Foma Fomich; he's wormed his way into his good graces and that's the only reason why they receive him at all. And because Foma Fomich used to be a clown himself,

it flatters him to have clowns of his own now. Who do you think my father is doing it for? He's doing it for me, only for me. He'd never bow and scrape before anyone for his own benefit, he's above that. Some people may find him ridiculous, but he is a noble man, the noblest of men. He believes, heaven knows why, and I assure you it's not because I receive good wages here either, but he believes that the best thing for me to do is to stay on in this house. But now I've definitely proved to him that he is wrong. I wrote to him quite firmly. That's why he came to take me away, and we'll leave tomorrow if it comes to that, because things could hardly be worse: they want to eat me alive, and I know for certain that they're shouting about me just now. They'll tear *him* to pieces because of me and wreck *his* life. And *he* is like a father to me, nay, even more than a father, understand? I don't want to wait for the outcome. I know more than the others. I'll leave tomorrow, yes, tomorrow. Who knows, this might make them put off *his* marriage with Tatyana Ivanovna for a little time at least. And now I've told you everything. Tell this to him too, because I can't even talk to him any more—they're watching us, Miss Perepelitsina especially. Tell him not to worry about me, that I'd rather eat dry bread and live in my father's hut than let *him* suffer through me. I'm poor and must live like the poor. But good Lord, what a row! What shouting! What's happening inside? No, I'll go in no matter what. I'll say all this to them straight out, come what may. I must do it. Good-bye!"

She ran away. I remained where I was, fully aware of the inanity of the part I had just been forced to play, and quite unable to see how it would all end. I felt sorry for the poor girl, and Uncle's fate worried me. Suddenly there was Gavrila speaking to me. He still had his notebook in his hands.

"Your Uncle wants you, please," he brought out despondently.

I was startled.

"Uncle? Where is he? What's happening to him now?"

"In the drawing room. Where you had tea earlier."

"Who's with him?"

"He's alone. He's waiting."

"For whom? For me?"

"He's sent for Foma Fomich. Ah, our carefree days are over," he added and sighed mournfully.

"For Foma Fomich? Hm. And where are the others? Where's the mistress?"

"In her rooms. The mistress has fainted and now she's lying in a senseless state and weeping."

Talking in this strain we reached the terrace. It was almost quite dark outside. I found Uncle alone in the room where I had had my clash with Foma Fomich. He was pacing the room with long strides. Candles were burning on the tables. When he saw me he rushed to me and gripped my hands. He was pale and his breath was laboured: his hands shook, and a nervous shudder ran over his whole frame again and again.

IX

HIS EXCELLENCY

"My friend! It's all finished, all settled!" he uttered in a tragic half-whisper.

"Uncle," I said, "I heard some shouts."

"Oh shouts, my dear chap, shouts, there were all sorts of shouts. Mamma has fainted, and everything is upside down. But I have decided and I shall not swerve from my decision. I'm no longer afraid of anyone, Sergei. I want to show them that I too have character, and I will. And that's why I sent for you, so you'd help me show them. My heart is broken, Sergei my boy... but I must, I am in duty bound to act in all sternness. Justice knows no mercy."

"But what could have happened, Uncle?"

"I am parting with Foma," Uncle said in a resolute voice.

"Uncle!" I cried delighted, "that's the best thing you could possibly do! And if there is anything I can do to help you car-

ry out your decision, I'm at your service for now and for ever."

"Thank you, my dear, thank you. But it's all settled now. I'm waiting for Foma, I've sent for him. It's either he or I. We have to part. Either Foma leaves this house tomorrow or I swear I'll give up everything and join the hussars again. They'll take me back and give me a division to command. Away with all this present system. Everything will be different now. What are you holding that French notebook for?" he cried furiously, turning to Gavrila. "Away with it. Burn it, trample on it, rip it across. *I* am your master, and *I* order you not to learn French. You may not, you dare not disobey me because *I* am your master, and not Foma Fomich."

"Thank the Lord," Gavrila muttered under his breath. Matters were taking a serious turn, it seemed.

"My friend," Uncle continued emotionally, "they want me to do the impossible. You shall be my judge: you shall judge impartially between them and me. You don't know, you cannot know what they wanted me to do, what they finally put to me as a formal demand when they all spoke their minds. But it's repugnant to humanity, decency, and honesty. I'll tell you everything, but first...."

"I already know everything, Uncle," I cried, interrupting his speech. "I can guess the rest. I've just been talking to Nastasya Yevgrafovna."

"My friend, not a word, not a word about this now," he hastily cut me short as though in alarm. "I'll tell you everything afterwards, but in the meantime.... Well then," he shouted to Vidoplyasov who came in just then. "Where is Foma Fomich?"

Vidoplyasov came to say that Foma Fomich "refused to come and considered the summons rude to the point of absurdity to which he, Foma Fomich took exception."

"Lead him in! Drag him in! Bring him here, drag him by force!" shouted Uncle, stamping his feet.

Vidoplyasov, who had never seen his master so enraged, retreated in fright. The whole thing amazed me.

"Something out of the ordinary must have happened to make a man like Uncle fly into such a rage and come to such harsh decisions," I thought.

For a few minutes Uncle paced the room in silence as though going through an inner struggle.

"On second thoughts don't tear up the book," he said at last to Gavrila. "Stay here and wait, you may yet be needed. My friend," he turned to me, "I'm afraid I rather let myself go just now. Whatever has to be done should be carried out with dignity and courage but without shouting or abuse. That's exactly it. D'you know, Sergei my boy, perhaps it would be best if you left the room? It doesn't really matter to you. I'll tell you everything afterwards, shall I? What do you say? Do this for me, please."

"Are you afraid, Uncle? Are you regretting your decision?" I asked, staring hard at him.

"No, no, my friend, I'm not regretting it," he cried with redoubled animation. "I'm not afraid of anything any longer. I have resolved upon decisive measures, the most decisive measures. You don't know, you cannot even imagine what it was they wanted me to do. Surely I could not have agreed? No, I'll show them. I have revolted and I shall show them. I had to show them some day, after all! But d'you know, my friend, I'm sorry I called you in: it may be very hard on Foma to have you as a sort of witness to his humiliation. You see, I want to refuse him my hospitality in a dignified manner, without humiliating him at all. But it's just words that there will be no humiliation. A matter like this, old chap, is bound to hurt no matter how honeyed your speech. And then I'm a boor and have no manners, I'm liable to blurt out something, as that I am, that I'll be sorry for afterwards. After all, he has done a great deal for me. Go, my friend. They're bringing him in now! Sergei, my boy, I beg you, leave the room. I'll tell you everything afterwards. Go, for Christ's sake."

Uncle took me out to the terrace just before Foma walked into the room. I must confess, however, I did not go away,

but decided to stay on the terrace. It was very dark there and so I could not be seen from the room. I decided to eavesdrop.

I'm not trying to make excuses for myself, but I do declare that I look upon that half hour's vigil on the terrace, enduring it without losing patience, as a deed befitting a martyr. From where I stood I could not only hear everything but also see everything through the glass doors. And now I ask the reader to picture Foma Fomich who has been *ordered* to come and threatened to be brought by force in case he refused.

"Did *my* ears hear your threat aright, Colonel?" Foma cried out walking into the room. "Is the message they brought me right?"

"Yes, Foma, calm down," Uncle began bravely. "Sit down: let's have a serious, friendly, brotherly talk. Do sit down, Foma."

Solemnly, Foma Fomich lowered himself into an armchair. Uncle paced the room with brisk, uneven steps, evidently finding it difficult to begin.

"In a brotherly way, that's it," he said. "You'll understand, Foma, you're not a child: I'm not a child either, in short we're both getting on.... Hm. You see, Foma, we disagree on certain points... yes, that's it, on certain points, and so, Foma, wouldn't it be best for us to part? I know you're a man of honour, that you wish me well, and so.... But why make a long speech of it! Foma, I'm your friend for now and for ever, and I swear it by all that's holy. Here is fifteen thousand rubles; that's all I have in the world, old man, I've scraped every bit together, I've stripped my family. Take it without compunction. I must, I'm in duty bound to provide for you. Most of it is in securities and the rest in notes. Take it without compunction. On your part you owe me nothing for I shall never be able to repay you for all that you have done for me. Yes, yes, that's exactly the way I feel about it although at the moment we disagree upon the most important point. Tomorrow or after tomorrow... or whenever you please—let us part. Go and stay in town, Foma, it's only ten versts or so away; there is a little house behind the church there, in the street be-

hind it, with green shutters, a sweet little house, it may have been built especially for you. The priest's widow owns it, she'll sell. I'll buy it for you in addition to this money. Make your home there close to us. Take up literature, and science; you'll become famous.... All the officials there are honourable, hospitable, honest men, every one of them; the priest is a scholar. You'll come and visit us on holidays—and we'll all live a heavenly life. Would you like it?"

"So these are the terms on which he's turning out Foma!" I thought. "Uncle concealed the money part from me."

A deep silence reigned in the room for a long time. Foma sat in his armchair as though struck dumb and stared unwaveringly at Uncle, who was obviously getting unnerved by this silence and this stare.

"Money!" Foma spoke at last in an artificially feeble voice. "Where is it, where is this money? Give it to me, give it to me quickly."

"Here it is, Foma, all I could scrape together, fifteen thousand exactly, it's all I had. It's in securities and notes... you'll see for yourself... here!"

"Gavrila! Take this money," Foma said humbly. "It might come in useful to you, old man. But no!" he suddenly shrieked with a peculiar squeal added to his shriek, and jumped to his feet. "No, give it to me first, Gavrila, give me the money, give it to me, give me those millions so I may trample upon them with my feet, so I may rip them across, spit on them, fling them away, sully them, dishonour them! Money is offered to me, me! They are bribing me to leave this house! Did I hear right? Did I live to suffer this ultimate disgrace? There, there, that much for your millions! Look: there, there, there, there! This is what Foma Opiskin would do, if you had not known it until now, Colonel!"

Foma threw the money about the room. It is a remarkable fact that he neither tore nor spat on a single note as he boasted he would do: he merely crumpled the notes a little, but not very badly either. Gavrila instantly began to pick up the

notes and later, when Foma left the room, handed them all back to his master.

Foma's action had a paralyzing effect on Uncle. He stood motionless before him now, vacantly staring with open mouth. In the meantime Foma settled back in his armchair again and wheezed as if he were inexpressibly agitated.

"You're noble, Foma!" Uncle cried at last coming out of his stupor. "You're the most honourable of men!"

"That I know," Foma replied in a faint voice, but with supreme dignity.

"Foma, forgive me! I behaved like a cad to you, Foma."

"Yes, you did," Foma agreed.

"Foma! What amazes me is not your nobleness of spirit," Uncle went on in exultation, "but the fact that I could be so rude, blind, and vile as to offer you money on these terms. But one thing you misunderstood, Foma: I wasn't trying to bribe you at all; I wasn't paying you to leave the house, I simply wanted you to have money too, so you would not be in need when you left me. I swear it's true. I'll go down on my knees. I'll beg your forgiveness on my bended knees and, Foma, if you like I'll go down on my knees before you now... if you just say you want me to...."

"I've no use for your bended knees, Colonel."

"But, good God, Foma, judge for yourself: you know I was agitated. I was shocked, I was beside myself. But tell me at least, tell me, what can I do to right this wrong? Tell me, say the word."

"Nothing, Colonel, nothing. And rest assured that not later than tomorrow I shall shake the dust off my feet on the threshold of this house."

Foma began to heave himself up from the chair. Horrified, Uncle hastened to seat him down again.

"No, Foma, no, you shan't leave, you shan't," cried Uncle. "There can be no talk of dust or feet, Foma! You shan't leave, if you do I'll follow you to the ends of the world, I shan't fall back until you've forgiven me. I swear, Foma, I'll do it."

"Forgive you? You are in fault?" said Foma. "I wonder if you do realize how much in fault you are towards me? Do you realize that you are in fault now for the very fact that you gave me a crust of bread in your house? Do you realize that in this one minute you have poisoned all those past crusts of bread which I have consumed in your house? You have thrown up those crusts into my face now, every bite of the bread already eaten by me; you have shown me that I was no better than a serf in your house, a flunkey, a mat to wipe your smart boots on. And yet, in the purity of my heart, I believed until now that I was living in your house like a friend, like a brother. Did not you yourself with your viper's tongue assure me thousands of times of this brotherhood? Why then did you covertly weave this spider's net for me which I got caught in like a fool? Why then did you dig this wolf-pit for me in the darkness of night, into which you yourself have now pushed me? Why did you not strike me down before with a single blow of this bludgeon? Why did you not break my neck like a cock's at the very outset ... because he lays no eggs, for instance. Yes, that's it, that's it. I stand for this comparison, Colonel; even though it is taken from the life of the rustics and smacks of the vulgar trend adopted in literature today; I stand for it because it shows up all the absurdity of your accusations; for I am as guilty towards you as that imaginary cock who displeased his flippant master by failing to lay any eggs. After all, Colonel, does one pay one's friend or one's brother, and for what? The main thing is for what? 'There, so to say, my beloved brother, I am indebted to you; you have even saved my life; here, take these Judas's silver pieces, only get out of my sight.' How naïve! How brutally you have treated me. You thought that I was after your gold, whereas I was guided by the most sacred of feelings for your welfare. Ah, you have indeed broken my heart! You have played with my noblest feelings the way a street urchin plays with his marbles or something. I foresaw all this long ago, Colonel, and that is why your bread has been choking me for a long, long time, that's why it has been sticking in my throat. That

is why your feather-beds have been crushing rather than comforting my body. That is why your sugar and your sweets were not sweets to me but cayenne pepper. No, Colonel! Live alone, prosper alone, and let Foma go his own sorrowful way, a bag hitched on his back. It will be so, Colonel."

"No, Foma, no! It will not be so, it can't be!" moaned my utterly defeated uncle.

"Yes, Colonel, yes! That's exactly how it will be, because it must be. I shall leave you tomorrow. Scatter your millions, carpet my road with them, my whole long road all the way to Moscow with your banknotes—and I shall tread on your banknotes proudly and contemptuously. This very foot, Colonel, will trample, soil, and crush those banknotes, and Foma Opiskin will live by the nobleness of his spirit alone. I have spoken, and shown you what I think. Good-bye, Colonel. Good-bye."

And once again Foma began to heave himself out of the chair.

"Forgive me, Foma, forgive and forget!" Uncle repeated again and again in entreaty.

"Forgive, you say! But what good will my forgiveness do you? Very well, supposing I do forgive you: I am a Christian, I cannot but forgive; even now I have almost forgiven you. But decide for yourself: will it be consistent at all with common sense or with my nobleness of spirit if I remain in your house be it for a single moment now? You did show me out, you know."

"It will be consistent, it will, Foma! I assure you it will."

"Will it? But are we equals now? How can you fail to see that I have, so to say, crushed you with my nobleness, and you have crushed your own self with your despicable action? You are crushed and I am elevated. So how can we be equals? And is friendship possible without equality? I am saying this with a cry of grief escaping my heart, and not triumphing, not putting myself above you as you may be thinking."

"But I too have a cry of grief escaping my heart, Foma, believe me."

"And this is the selfsame man," Foma went on changing his tone of sternness to one of saintliness, "the man for whom I stayed awake so many nights. How often when sleep fled me at night, did I rise from my bed, light my candle, and say to myself, 'He sleeps in peace, his trust placed in you. But you must not sleep, Foma, you must stay awake for his sake: you may be able to devise something even better for this man's well-being.' Thus thought Foma on his sleepless nights, Colonel. And thus you have repaid him, Colonel. But enough, enough."

"But, Foma, I will regain your friendship again, I will, I promise you."

"Where is the guarantee that you will? As a Christian I shall forgive and even love you: but as a man, and a man of lofty principles, I shall despise you in spite of myself. I must, it is my duty in the name of morality because, I repeat this to you, you have disgraced yourself, and I have performed the most noble of actions. Tell me, is anyone of *your set* capable of such an action? Who of them would refuse a vast sum of money like that, which Foma, a pauper despised by all, has nevertheless refused for his love of the sublime? Oh no, Colonel, in order to become my equal you shall have to perform a whole series of feats now. And what feat are you capable of if you cannot even call me Foma Fomich like your equal and call me Foma instead, like a servant?"

"Foma, I did it in all friendliness, you know," Uncle cried up. "I never knew it was displeasing to you. Good God! Had I only known. . . ."

"You," continued Foma, "who could not, or rather, would not grant that trifling, paltry request of mine, when I asked you to address me as a general and say 'Your Excellency,' to me. . . ."

"But, Foma, why that was really infringing upon the highest rights, so to say."

"Infringing! Bah! You've memorized a phrase out of some book and now you're muttering it like a parrot. Do you not realize that you have disgraced and dishonoured me by refusing to call me 'Your Excellency,' you have dishonoured me by

showing me up for a cranky fool in your inability to fathom my reasons, a fool fit for the madhouse. Surely I know that it would be absurd of me to want to be called 'Your Excellency,' when I am the one to scorn all these ranks and worldly splendours, despicable in themselves unless they are blessed with virtue? A general's rank unblessed by virtue I would not accept if you paid me a million. And yet you took me for a madman. I sacrificed my pride for your own good and allowed you, *you* and your *scholars* to take me for a madman! The only reason why I resolved to demand a general's title from you was to enlighten your mind, to develop your moral strength, and to shed the light of new ideas upon you. What I wanted was to teach you not to revere all generals in future as if they were the loftiest heavenly bodies in the universe. I wanted to prove to you that a rank is nothing without generosity, and that the arrival of your general friend was nothing to be so overjoyed about when there were others, right there beside you, perhaps glowing with virtue. But you always swaggered so before me with your rank of colonel, that you could not bring yourself to say 'Your Excellency' to me. This is the true reason, this is where you must look for it, and not in any infringement upon any high rights. All the reason there is is that you are a colonel, and I'm simply Foma. . . ."

"No, Foma, no! I assure you it is not so. You are a scholar, you're not simply Foma. . . . I respect. . . ."

"You do! Very well. Then tell me, if you do respect me, am I or am I not worthy of a general's rank in your opinion? Answer me instantly and firmly: am I or am I not. I want to see how intelligent you are, how developed your mind."

"Your honesty, disinterestedness, wisdom, and the incomparable nobleness of your soul makes you worthy!" Uncle pronounced with pride.

"And if I am, why won't you call me 'Your Excellency'?"

"Foma, I believe I will."

"I demand it! I demand it now, Colonel, I insist upon it and demand it. I am demanding it because I see how difficult it is for you. This sacrifice on your part will be the first step

leading you on to the path of feats of virtue, for—you must not forget it—you have to perform a whole series of feats in order to become my equal; you must master your own self, and only then shall I believe in your sincerity."

"Foma, I'll call you 'Your Excellency' no later than tomorrow!"

"No, not tomorrow, Colonel, tomorrow will take care of itself. I insist that you call me 'Your Excellency' now, this instant!"

"Very well, Foma, I'm willing. Only, how shall I do it right now, this instant, Foma?"

"And why not now? Are you ashamed perhaps? If you are ashamed, I shall feel hurt."

"Oh very well, Foma, I'm willing. I'll be quite proud to. Only how shall I do it, Foma, I can't just say, 'Good morning, Your Excellency,' can I? It's not done, you know."

"No, not 'Good morning, Your Excellency,' that sounds insolent: it sounds like a joke, a farce. I forbid such jokes to be played on me. Think better of it, Colonel, think better of it at once! Change your tone!"

"You're joking, aren't you, Foma?"

"First of all, I am not Foma to you, Yegor Ilyich, be kind enough to remember that my name is Foma Fomich."

"Why, Foma Fomich, I'll be glad to, honestly I will. I'm as glad as can be. Only what shall I say?"

"You're finding it difficult to find words to follow 'Your Excellency'—I can quite see that. Why didn't you say so before? It is pardonable especially when a person is *not a writer,* to put it politely. Well, since you're no writer I shall help you. Say after me: 'Your Excellency'."

"Oh well, Your Excellency."

"No, not 'oh well, Your Excellency,' but simply Your Excellency. I've told you, Colonel, to change your tone. I also trust you will not take it as an insult if I suggest that you incline your head slightly and at the same time bend your body forward. When speaking to a general one always bends one's body forward, thus expressing one's deference and readiness to fly,

so to say, to do the general's bidding. I myself have been in the society of generals and know all about it. Well then, Your Excellency."

"Your Excellency. . . ."

"I am delighted and overjoyed that I have, at last, this opportunity of begging your forgiveness for not recognizing Your Excellency's nobleness of soul from the very first. I promise that henceforth I shall devote all my humble efforts to the common good. . . . Oh well, that's enough for you."

Poor Uncle! He was forced to repeat all this drivel sentence for sentence, word for word! I stood there blushing with shame. Anger choked me.

"Now then, do you not feel that your conscience has suddenly grown easier, as though an angel or something has flown into your soul?" continued the tormentor. "Do you or do you not feel the presence of this angel? Answer me!"

"Yes, Foma, I really do feel easier somehow," answered Uncle.

"Do you feel that after mastering yourself your heart has, so to say, been dipped in balm?"

"Yes, Foma, it really feels as if some oil has been put into the old wheels."

"Some oil, did you say? Hm. I wasn't talking about oil, by the way. Oh well, never mind. This is the feeling a duty performed gives you, Colonel. Continue mastering yourself. You are proud, inordinately proud."

"I do see it now, Foma," Uncle replied sighing.

"You are selfish, I should even say gloomily selfish."

"It's true that I'm selfish, Foma, I see it too. I've known it ever since I've known you."

"I'm speaking to you like a father, like a fond mother . . . you repel people, forgetting that an affectionate calf sucks two cows."

"Too true, Foma."

"You are rude. You thrust yourself into people's hearts so rudely, demand attention so arrogantly, that you make a decent man want to flee you as fast as his legs will carry him."

Uncle heaved another deep sigh.

"Be kinder, more considerate and affectionate to others; forget your own ego for others, and then you, too, will be remembered. Live and let live—such is my rule. Suffer, toil, pray, and hope—these are the truths which I should like to instil in all mankind. Live up to them, and then I shall be the first to open my heart to you, and weep on your breast... if need be.... It's always been you and your ego, nothing but you and your ego. After all, others will get sick and tired of your ego one day, if I may be allowed to say so."

"What a sweet-spoken man," Gavrila said in humble reverence.

"It's true, Foma; I do feel it all," Uncle agreed, greatly moved. "But, Foma, it isn't all my own fault alone: I've been brought up this way; I've lived among soldiers. I swear to you, Foma. I, too, was not without feeling. When I was saying good-bye to my regiment, all the hussars, my whole division simply wept, they all said that they'd never get another man like me. So I thought then that maybe I wasn't quite a lost soul."

"The egoist again! I've caught you out again in vanity and pride. You are bragging and, in passing, you have reproached me with your hussars' tears. Oh well, I'm not bragging of anyone's tears. And yet I could have done; I might have some to brag of too."

"Oh Foma, it just slipped my tongue, I just couldn't help remembering the good old times."

"A good time doesn't drop down from heaven like manna, we make it, it lives in our hearts, Yegor Ilyich. Take me: I am always happy and content in spite of my sufferings, calm in spirit and a bore to no one, except perhaps to all those fools, triflers, and *scholars* whom I do not spare and refuse to spare. I dislike fools. And what sort of scholars are they anyway? 'A man of learning!' Bah! Why, his learning is not learning at all but deception and a fluke. Now what was it *he* said? Bring him here! Bring all the scholars here. I can stand up to them

all: I can upset all their postulates. To say nothing of the nobleness of soul, of course."

"To be sure, Foma, to be sure. No one would question it."

"Earlier in the afternoon, for instance, I evinced my intelligence, giftedness, immense erudition, knowledge of the human heart, and modern literature; I gave a brilliant demonstration of how a gifted man could on the spur of the moment turn a thing like the Komarinsky dance into a lofty theme of conversation. And what happened? Did anyone present give me due appreciation? No, they turned away. I'm certain, you know, that he has already told you that I don't know a thing. And yet it may have been Machiavelli himself or some Mercadante or other facing him, his only fault being that he is poor and in obscurity. Oh no, they shan't get away with it. There's also some talk about Korovkin. What sort of a bird is he?"

"He's a clever man, Foma, a man of learning. I'm expecting him. That one is sure to be good, Foma."

"Hm. I doubt it. He's probably one of those modern asses loaded down with books. They have no souls in them, Colonel, no hearts. And what is learning without virtue?"

"No, Foma, no! You should have heard him speak of matrimony; his words went straight to the heart, Foma."

"Hm. We'll see, we'll give Korovkin a test too. But enough now," Foma said, getting up from his chair. "I cannot forgive you entirely yet, Colonel; the hurt still rankles; but I shall pray and maybe God will send peace to my outraged spirit. We shall talk about this again tomorrow, but now allow me to leave you. I feel tired and weak."

"Why, Foma, you really do look tired," Uncle gushed. "I've an idea! What about a bite of something? Shall I tell them to bring something?"

"A bite! Ha-ha-ha! A bite!" Foma replied with a disdainful chuckle. "You're given a glass of poison first and then you're offered a bite of something! Cooked mushrooms and pickled apples to heal the wounds in your heart! What a sorry materialist you are, Colonel."

"Dear me, I meant it kindly, honestly I did, Foma."

"Well, then, enough of this. I shall leave you now, and you must go to your mother at once; go down on your knees before her, sob and weep, but be sure to secure her forgiveness—it is your duty, your sacred duty."

"Ah Foma, I've been thinking of nothing else all the while, even now, while talking to you, the thought never left me. I'm willing to remain on my knees before her till daybreak if necessary. But think, Foma, what it is they want of me! After all it's unfair, it's cruel, Foma. Be generous to the last, make my happiness complete, think, decide and then . . . and then. . . I swear. . . ."

"No, Yegor Ilyich, it's none of my business," said Foma. "You know that I'm taking no part in this business at all: or rather you are convinced that I am the cause of everything; I assure you, however, that I have estranged myself entirely from this business at the outset. It is only the will of your mother and she, naturally, wishes you well. Go now, hurry, fly to her and put matters right with your obedience. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath! And I . . . I shall pray for you all night. I have long lost the meaning of sleep, Yegor Ilyich. Farewell. Farewell to you too, old man," he added, turning to Gavrila. "I know that you were doing another's will. You too forgive me if I have wronged you. Farewell, farewell, farewell, all, and may God bless you."

Foma walked out. I dashed back into the room.

"Have you been eavesdropping?" Uncle cried.

"Yes, Uncle, I have been eavesdropping. And you, you could call him 'Your Excellency!'"

"What could I do, old chap! I'm actually proud. It's nothing when you're doing something truly heroic. But what a noble, what a disinterested, what a great man he is! Sergei, you heard it, didn't you? I simply fail to understand how I could go and thrust my money at him! My friend! I was carried away, I was in a frenzy, I did not understand him, I suspected him, accused him . . . but no! he could never have been my ill-wisher, I see it now. D'you remember what a noble look he wore when he refused my money?"

"Very well, Uncle, be as proud of yourself as you wish, but I'm leaving: I've no patience left. I'm asking you for the last time: what do you want of me? Why did you send for me and what do you expect of me? If everything is settled and I am of no use to you, I shall leave. I cannot stand spectacles such as this one. I'm leaving today."

"My friend," Uncle was in a fluster as usual, "wait just two minutes; I'm going to see Mamma, old chap.... I have to put an end to it... the matter is tremendous, great, momentous. Go to your room for the while. Gavrila here will take you to the summer lodge. You know the summer lodge, don't you? It's in the garden. I've given the orders, and your valise has already been taken there. I'll go upstairs, entreat and be forgiven, I'll take a risk—I know what I should do now —and then I'll fly to you, and tell you everything, everything to the last bit, I'll pour out my heart to you. And ... and... happy days will come for you and me some day, won't they? Two minutes, just two minutes, Sergei."

He shook my hand and hurried out. There was nothing for it, I had to follow Gavrila once again.

X

MIZINCHIKOV

The lodge Gavrila brought me to was only called the "new lodge" from force of habit, but actually it had been there for many years, built by the former owners. It was a nice little timber house standing in the garden a few paces away from the old house. On three sides it was hemmed in with tall old lime-trees, which touched the roof with their boughs. All the four rooms of this little house were furnished with some taste and were meant for guests. I walked into the room assigned to me, where my valise had already been brought, and saw on the bedside table a sheet of writing paper covered with beautiful lettering of different types, adorned with vignettes and flourishes. The capital letters and the vignettes were illuminat-

ed in different colours. The whole thing looked like a very pretty piece of calligraphy. The first words I read told me that it was a begging letter addressed to me, in which the writer called me an "enlightened benefactor." The letter was entitled: "Plaints of Vidoplyasov." No matter how hard I tried to fathom the meaning of the letter, my efforts were all in vain: it was sheer bombastic nonsense, written in the high-flown style of flunkeys. All I grasped was that Vidoplyasov was in some sort of straits, was begging me to help him, was resting his hopes in me about something or other "on account of my enlightenment" and in conclusion was asking me to talk to Uncle in his behalf, and influence him with "my machinery" —to quote his words at the end of the epistle. I was still reading it when the door opened and in walked Mizinchikov.

"I trust you will allow me to make shorter acquaintance with you," he said with familiarity but very politely, and offered me his hand. "I had no chance to have a word with you earlier, and yet at first glance I felt I wanted to know you better."

I instantly replied that I, too, was glad and so on and so forth, although I was in a most horrible mood. We sat down.

"What's this?" he asked, looking at the piece of paper in my hands. "It can't be Vidoplyasov's plaints, can it? Why, it is. I was sure Vidoplyasov would tackle you as well. I, too, received a paper just like this from him, with the same plaints: he's been looking forward to your arrival for some time, and must have prepared it beforehand. Let nothing amaze you: there is much that is queer here and some of it is quite amusing, truly."

"Just amusing?"

"Surely it's not worth crying about. If you like, I'll tell you Vidoplyasov's life story, and I'm sure it will amuse you."

"Frankly I can't be bothered with Vidoplyasov at the moment," I said resentfully.

It was quite clear to me that the gentleman's visit and pleasant conversation had some sort of motive behind it, and that Mr. Mizinchikov had no use for me as such. At tea he had

worn a frown and had looked grave: now he was affable and gay and eager to tell me long stories. One could tell at once that the man was complete master of himself and, apparently, had some knowledge of his fellow-men.

"The cursed Foma!" I said, and angrily banged my fist on the table. "I'm sure he's at the root of all the evil here and is involved in everything. The damned brute."

"You seem to be rather too angry with him," Mizinchikov observed.

"Too angry!" I cried, flaring up at once. "I know I was carried away at tea and so gave anyone the right to criticize me. I realize perfectly well that I acted too impulsively and put my foot in it in every respect, and I hardly see the need to point it out to me. I also realize that it was not the thing to do in polite society, but don't you see it was impossible not to be carried away? Why, this is a madhouse, if you want to know. And then... then... I'm leaving this place, that's all!"

"Do you smoke?" Mizinchikov asked composedly.

"Yes."

"Then you will allow me to smoke, too, I suppose. They don't allow it in there, and I'm almost dying for a smoke. I agree," he went on after lighting a cigarette, "that all this resembles a madhouse, but rest assured that I would not venture to criticize you for the very reason that in your place I would have lost my temper and been thrice as agitated as you, perhaps."

"But if you were really as vexed why didn't you lose your temper then? You were on the contrary very cool and collected, I remember, and, frankly, it even seemed strange to me that you did not stand up for poor Uncle, who is so generous to all and sundry."

"You're right there: he has been generous to many, but I consider it absolutely useless to stand up for him: firstly, it would do him no good and would even be humiliating for him in a way, and, secondly, they'd turn me out instantly. And I will tell you frankly that my circumstances are such that I must perforce value the hospitality offered me here."

"But I make no claim whatever on your confidence as far as your circumstances are concerned.... However, since you've been staying here for a whole month, there's something I'd like to ask you."

"Do not hesitate to ask, I'm at your service," Mizinchikov replied eagerly, moving up his chair closer.

"Can you throw some light on this, for instance: why did Foma Fomich refuse the offer of fifteen thousand rubles in silver money* which he actually held in his hands—I saw it with my own eyes."

"What? He didn't!" cried Mizinchikov. "Tell me about it, please."

I told him the story, leaving out the "Your Excellency" part. Mizinchikov listened with avid curiosity. When I came to the fifteen thousand, his very face seemed to undergo a change.

"That's a smart trick! I never thought Foma was up to it," he said when he had heard the story to the end.

"He did refuse the money, however! How would you explain that? Could it be the nobleness of his soul?"

"He refused fifteen thousand so as to take thirty later on. However, d'you know what I think?" he said after a moment's thought. "I doubt if Foma was motivated by gain. He's not a practical sort, just another poet, in his own way. But fifteen thousand... hm! You see, he would have taken the money, but he could not resist the temptation of showing off and striking a pose. He's such a sloppy, whining beggar, I'll tell you, and add to this self-esteem at its most boundless."

Mizinchikov was quite angry. It was obvious that he was vexed, and he even seemed envious. I watched him with interest.

"Hm. Great changes are in the offing," he said thoughtfully. "Yegor Ilyich will say his prayers to Foma now. I wouldn't be surprised if he agreed to the marriage now that he feels so moved," he added with set teeth.

* A silver ruble was equivalent to 3 rubles 50 kopeks in notes.

"You believe then that this foul, unnatural marriage with that demented fool is a foregone conclusion, do you?"

Mizinchikov gave me a searching look.

"The scoundrels!" I burst out.

"Their idea is not without grounds, however: they insist that it's time he did something for the family."

"Hasn't he done enough for them?" I cried in indignation. "And you, you call it a well-grounded idea—to marry a vulgar fool!"

"I agree with you, of course, that she is a fool. It's very good that you are so fond of your uncle; I sympathize with him too... and yet, with her money, this estate could be so nicely enlarged! However, they have other reasons as well: they are afraid Yegor Ilyich might marry the governess, remember that attractive girl who was there?"

"But is it... is it possible?" I asked in agitation. "I believe it's just gossip. Tell me for heaven's sake, it's frightfully important to me."

"Oh, he's head over heels in love! He's making a secret of it naturally."

"He is? D'you think he is? What about her? Does she love him?"

"It's very likely that she loves him too. However, she has every reason for marrying him: she's very poor."

"But what grounds have you for thinking they love one another?"

"Why, one can't help noticing it: and besides, it is believed they have clandestine meetings. It was even asserted that she was having an improper affair with him. But please don't let it go any further. I'm telling you this in confidence."

"Surely it's beyond belief!" I exclaimed. "And you, do you admit that you believe it?"

"Naturally I don't believe it absolutely, I wasn't present. However, it's quite likely."

"How can it be! Think how noble-minded and honourable Uncle is!"

"I agree; but one can become infatuated with the firm intention of ending up in wedlock. That is often the way with infatuations. I repeat, however, that I do not insist on the absolute veracity of this rumour at all, especially since they have sullied her name rather too badly here: it was even said that she once had an affair with Vidoplyasov."

"There, you see!" I exclaimed. "With Vidoplyasov, of all people! Is that possible? Isn't it too disgusting to hear? Surely you don't believe that too?"

"I am telling you that I don't believe all this absolutely," Mizinchikov replied calmly. "And yet who knows, it may have happened. Anything might happen in this world. I wasn't present, you know, and besides I consider it none of my business. But seeing that you are so concerned with all this, I consider it my duty to add that there is indeed little likelihood that she had an affair with Vidoplyasov. It's all Anna Nilovna's doing, you know Miss Perepelitsina: it was she who set these rumours abroad from sheer jealousy, because she herself used to dream of marrying Yegor Ilyich—I swear it's true—thinking she was a match for him because she is a major's daughter. Now that she's been disappointed, she's awfully furious. However, I believe I've told you all about this already, and I confess I very much dislike gossip, especially since we're simply wasting our precious time. You see, I have a small favour to ask you, that's why I'm here."

"A favour? Certainly, if there's anything I can do for you."

"I understand, and what is more, I'm hoping you will not remain indifferent, because I can see how fond you are of your uncle and what concern you display for his matrimonial affairs. But before I speak of the main favour, I'd like to ask you another favour, a preliminary one."

"What is it?"

"It's this: perhaps you will agree to do my main favour, perhaps you will not, but in either event, before stating it, I must very kindly ask you to do me this great favour: give me your word of honour as a nobleman and a gentleman that everything I say to you now will remain a secret between you

and me, that you will never betray this trust to anyone, under any circumstances, and will not take advantage of the idea which I am compelled to disclose to you. Do you agree to this or not?"

This was a solemn preface. I said I agreed.

"Well then," I prompted him.

"It's a very simple matter when you come to think of it," Mizinchikov began. "You see, I want to take Tatyana Ivanovna away and marry her; to cut a long story short it will be something in the manner of Gretna Green—understand?"

I looked straight into Mr. Mizinchikov's eyes and for a minute was deprived of speech.

"I must confess that I do not understand a thing," I brought out at last. "And besides, thinking that I was dealing with a sensible man, I, on my part, never thought...."

"Thinking—you never thought!" Mizinchikov interrupted me, "to put it into plain Russian, it means that I and my plan are stupid—isn't that it?"

"No, not at all... but...."

"Oh please, don't mince words. Don't bother to, you'll actually be doing me a great pleasure, because this way it's nearer the point. I do agree that offhand all this may seem rather queer. But I assure you that far from being stupid my intention is sensible to a degree: if you will be so kind as to listen to all the circumstances...."

"Oh, please! I'm listening avidly."

"There's hardly anything to tell. You see, I've run into debt and I haven't a kopek to my name. Besides, I have a sister, a girl of nineteen. Our parents are dead and she works as a governess, and has no means at all, you know. I'm partly to blame for this too. We inherited an estate, with forty serfs, and this coincided, most unfortunately, with my getting my commission. Well, I mortgaged it first, of course, and then I squandered it for good. I lived foolishly, set the fashion as if I were Burtsov or someone, gambled, drank—in short it was all so foolish it shames me to remember it. I've come down to earth now and want to change my mode of life completely.

But to do this I absolutely must have a hundred thousand in notes. Since the service would get me nowhere, and I'm not capable of anything on my own and have no education to speak of, it naturally follows that I must choose one of the two ways open to me: stealing, or marrying for money. I walked here all but barefoot, I walked, mind you, I did not drive. My sister gave me her last three rubles when I started out from Moscow. The moment I saw Tatyana Ivanovna, the idea struck me. I instantly made up my mind to sacrifice myself and marry her. You must agree that, if anything, this is common sense. Besides, I'm doing it more for my sister's sake than my own ... well, my own too."

"But look here, do you want to make a formal proposal to Tatyana Ivanovna?"

"Heaven forbid! They'd kick me out at once, and then she would never agree either: but she won't think twice if I ask her to elope, to run away. That's all that matters: so long as it's something romantic and out of the ordinary. It goes without saying that we'd get married at once. The only thing is to lure her away from here."

"What makes you so sure that she wouldn't think twice about eloping with you?"

"Oh, have no fear on that score! That's something I'm quite sure of. It's what the whole plan hinges on, that Tatyana Ivanovna is liable to start a love affair with absolutely anyone she comes across, anyone to whom it would occur to reciprocate her feelings. That's why I made you promise beforehand that you wouldn't use my idea for your own ends. I'm sure you will see that with my circumstances what they are it would be a sin not to take this chance."

"In other words she's quite mad ... oh, forgive me," I added hastily. "Now that you're intending to...."

"Please don't mince words, I've asked you not to. You want to know if she's quite mad? What shall I say? She's not mad, of course, because she hasn't been put into the madhouse yet; besides, I honestly see nothing particularly mad in this mania of hers for love affairs. In spite of everything she's an

honest girl. You see, she was terribly poor until last year, and was at the mercy of benefactresses since the day she was born. She has an unusually sensitive heart: no one ever proposed to her, and well, you know how it is: dreams, desires, hopes, an ardent heart which she always had to curb, her benefactresses always tormenting her—all this, of course, could easily lead to a nervous disorder in a sensitive nature. And then this wealth suddenly coming to her: you must agree that it would have overwhelmed anyone. Obviously enough she's sought after now, people pay her court, and all her hopes have been resurrected. This afternoon she was telling about a dandy in a white waistcoat: it all happened precisely the way she told it. By this you may judge of the rest. She falls instant prey to sighs, *billet-doux*, and poetry; and if to this you add a hint of silken ladders, Spanish serenades and all the rest of this bosh, she'll be yours to do with as you please. I have already sampled it and a secret rendezvous was my instant reward. However, I'm biding my time and am not going further for the moment. But I must take her away in three or four days' time without fail. The day before I do, I shall put in a few sighs and honeyed words—I can play the guitar and sing quite nicely. That night we'll have a rendezvous in the summer house and by daybreak the carriage will be waiting: I'll lure her out of the house, we'll get in and away we'll drive. There's no risk involved, you understand. She's of age, and besides it's all her own free will. And once she's run away with me it'll mean, of course, that she is bound to me. I'll take her to a certain poor but respectable family—there is one here, about forty versts away—where they'll keep her in hand until the wedding and will let no one near her: in the meantime I shan't be wasting my time, I'll arrange for the wedding to take place three days later—it can be done. I'll need money first, of course. According to my calculations, the whole interlude will cost no more than five hundred in silver, and in this I'm relying on Yegor Ilyich: he's certain to give it to me if he knows nothing of the business. Do you understand, now?"

"I do," I said, understanding everything perfectly at last. "But tell me, just what can I do for you in this business?"

"Ah, you can do plenty, plenty! Otherwise I'd never have asked you. I've already told you that I have a certain respectable, though poor, family in mind. Well, you can help me here and there, and be a witness too, if it comes to that. I must confess, that I'll be quite helpless without your assistance."

"One more question: why did you choose me to honour with your confidence, a man you hardly know considering that I only arrived a few hours ago?"

"Your question," said Mizinchikov with the friendliest of smiles, "affords me great pleasure, I candidly admit, because it gives me the opportunity of expressing my particular respect for you."

"Oh, you flatter me."

"No, you see, I made something of a study of you at tea. Granted you are hot-tempered and, shall we say, young, but there's one thing I know for certain: once you've given me your word not to tell anyone, you are sure to keep it. You're no Obnoskin. That's one. You are honest and will not use my idea for your own ends, unless, of course, you wish to make a friendly deal with me. That's two. In the latter event I may be willing to concede my idea, that is Tatyana Ivanovna, to you, and would zealously help you with the elopement, on condition that you paid me fifty thousand in notes a month after the wedding, for which you'd naturally give me security beforehand in the form of a promissory note, without interest."

"What!" I cried. "Are you offering her to me now?"

"I'll naturally let you have her if you wish, if you make up your mind. I'd be the loser, of course, but then the idea belongs to me, and ideas cost money. I've invited you in because there's no one to choose from. That's three. With the present situation here, tarrying is out of question. Besides, the Fast of the Assumption is at hand and they won't wed you then. I trust I have your complete understanding now."

"Absolutely, and once again I promise to keep your secret

perfectly intact; but I cannot be a partner to you in this business, and deem it my duty to inform you of this at once."

"Why not?"

"Why not, you ask!" I shouted, giving vent at last to my accumulated wrath. "Don't you realize that a thing like that is, if anything, dishonourable? Granted your calculations are faultless, based on the young lady's weak-mindedness and unfortunate mania, but if you are a man of honour this should be sufficient in itself to hold you back. You yourself have said that in spite of her queerness she is deserving of respect. And yet you'd take advantage of her misfortune to squeeze a hundred thousand out of her. You're not going to be a real husband to her, of course, in the full sense of the word, you're certain to leave her. It's so dishonourable that, frankly, I fail to understand how you dared ask me to be your collaborator."

"Goodness gracious, what romantic notions!" Mizinchikov cried, staring at me with unfeigned amazement. "However, I shouldn't say romantic notions, it's simply that you don't seem to understand what all this is about. You say it's dishonourable, and yet she'll be the one to benefit, and not I.... Just consider it all."

"Naturally, from your point of view, I dare say it does appear that if you marry Tatyana Ivanovna you'll be doing the most generous of deeds," I replied with a sarcastic smile.

"I should say so! The most generous of deeds—that's just what it would be, precisely," Mizinchikov shouted, losing his temper too. "Just think: firstly, I'll be sacrificing myself in agreeing to become her husband—that's worth something, isn't it? Secondly, in spite of the fact that she has a sure hundred thousand in silver, in spite of this I'll be only taking a hundred thousand in notes, and have already promised myself never to take another kopek from her as long as I live, although I easily could—that's worth something again, isn't it? And finally, think: can she live her life in safety? To live her life in safety she must be relieved of her money and placed in a madhouse, otherwise there will always be the danger of some rogue of fortune hunter, complete with imperial and a

small moustache, a serenading, guitar-playing loafer like Obnoskin, coming along, seducing her, marrying her, fleecing her, and then leaving her stranded somewhere on the road. This, for instance, is a highly respectable family, and yet the only reason they tolerate her here is because they are after her money. She must be spared the risk, she must be saved. And obviously, once she marries me the danger is gone. I'll make it my duty to guard her from misfortune. To begin with, I shall immediately take her to Moscow and place her in a respectable but poor home—that's not the one I mentioned earlier; it's another family. My sister will be with her constantly and will keep a vigilant eye on her. She'll have about two hundred and fifty thousand in notes left, or perhaps even three hundred thousand: you know the life one can enjoy on that! She'll have all the pleasures for the asking: balls, masquerades, concerts, and everything. She may even dream of love affairs, but I'll naturally protect myself on that score: she may dream to her heart's content, but she won't be able to do anything, oh no! At present anyone who wants to may take advantage of her, but no one will be able to then: she'll be my wife, Madame Mizinchikova, and I won't let my name be sullied, no sir! That alone means something, doesn't it? I shan't live with her, that goes without saying. She'll live in Moscow and I'll be in St. Petersburg or somewhere. I admit that, because I'm open and above board with you in this deal. But what if we do live apart, what of it? Consider her character for a moment and tell me: is she capable of being a wife and of living together with her husband? Can constancy be expected of her? She's the most flighty creature in the world, you know. She needs perpetual change; the fact that she has married somebody and has become a lawful wife might easily slip her memory the very next day. Why, I'd make her utterly miserable if I lived together with her and expected a faithful performance of her duties. I shall naturally come and see her once a year or so, and not to get money from her either, believe me. I've already said that I shan't take more than a hundred thousand in notes from her and re-

ally I shan't! As far as money goes I'll be treating her most honourably. She'll be delighted rather than bored with my two- or three-day visits: I shall laugh with her, tell her amusing stories, take her to balls, flirt with her, give her little souvenirs, sing serenades, present her with a lap-dog; then we'll part like lovers and after that we'll write love letters to one another. Why, she'll be thrilled to have a husband who's gay, romantic and in love with her. That's reasonable, I think: all husbands should behave like that. Wives only prize their husbands when they are away, and according to my method I'll capture Tatyana Ivanovna's heart in the sweetest way for the rest of her life. What else can she want? Tell me! Why, it will be like living in paradise!"

I listened with silent curiosity, realizing that it was hopeless to argue with Mr. Mizinchikov. He had the faith of a fanatic in the justice and even grandeur of his scheme and spoke of it with the enthusiasm of an inventor. There was one objection, however, of a very delicate nature, that needed clarification.

"Have you considered that she is all but engaged to Uncle?" I asked. "Your eloping with her will be a great affront to him: you'll be taking her away practically on the eve of the wedding, and more than that you'll be borrowing the money to perform this deed from *him*!"

"Ah, that's where I shall trip you up!" Mizinchikov cried heatedly. "Have no fear, I have anticipated this objection of yours. But first and foremost: your Uncle has not proposed yet; therefore, I am not bound to know that they're planning the engagement; besides, I want you to note that this undertaking was conceived in my mind three weeks ago before I knew anything of their intentions, and therefore I am under no moral obligation to him whatsoever, and what is more, strictly speaking, it is not I but he who is taking my *fiancée* away, with whom, mind you, I have already had a secret rendezvous in the arbour. And then, look here: were not you yourself in a frenzy a minute ago because they were forcing your uncle to marry Tatyana Ivanovna? And now you are

suddenly championing this marriage and speaking of an affront to the family, of honour or something? Why, I'll be doing your uncle a tremendous favour: I'll be rescuing him, surely you see that! This marriage is loathsome to him and, besides, he loves another girl. Is Tatyana Ivanovna the wife for him, I ask you? She'd be miserable with him too because, say what you may, something would have to be done to restrain her from throwing roses at young men. And once I carry her away in the middle of the night no general's lady and no Foma Fomich in the world will be able to do anything about it. Bringing back a *fiancée* who has eloped with another is much too disgraceful. Am I not doing a favour, a good deed, to Yegor Ilyich?"

I must admit that I was greatly impressed by this last argument of his.

"And what if he proposes tomorrow?" I said. "It will be too late then: she'll be formally engaged to him."

"Of course it will be too late. That's what we have to work on, to see that it isn't too late. Why else am I seeking your cooperation? It's difficult for me alone, but the two of us will fix matters and make sure that Yegor Ilyich does not propose. We must do everything to intervene, perhaps even give Foma Fomich a thrashing if there's no other way, to take their minds off the wedding. That would be an extraordinary measure, to be sure, but I was just making a suggestion. In this I need your help."

"One last question: have you confided this plan of yours to anyone but me?"

Mizinchikov scratched his head and made a very wry face.

"I admit your question is like the bitterest of pills to me," he said. "That's the whole point, you know, that I have already confided my idea to . . . that is, I've made a blundering fool of myself. And if you only knew who I told! Obnoskin! I can hardly believe it of myself! It confounds me how it happened at all! It was just his being about the place; I didn't know him very well yet, and when this inspiration struck me I was naturally in a fever of excitement, and since I realized

at once that I should need an assistant, I approached Obnoskin. Oh it was unpardonable, quite unpardonable!"

"And what did Obnoskin say to it?"

"He gladly agreed to help, but early the next day he vanished. He reappeared with his mamma three days later. He did not say a word to me and actually shunned me, as if he were afraid. I saw through it all at once. His mamma is such a shameless schemer, you know, with all the experience in the world, so to say. I used to know her once. He told her everything of course. I said nothing and waited; they're spying on me, and the matter has taken rather a tricky turn. That's why I'm in such a hurry."

"What exactly are you afraid they'll do?"

"They can't do much, of course, but I'm positive they'll do something nasty. They'll demand money for their silence and their help: I'm quite prepared for that. Only I can't and won't give them much, I've made up my mind not to: not more than three thousand rubles in notes. Judge for yourself: that's three thousand gone, five hundred in silver for the wedding which I must pay back to Uncle in full, and then my old debts, my sister too, I've got to give her something, at least a trifle. Will there be much left of the hundred thousand? Why, it's sheer ruin! Incidentally, the Obnoskins have left."

"Have they?" I asked with interest.

"They went immediately after tea. To the devil with them anyway. They'll be back tomorrow, mark my words. Well then, do you agree?"

"Frankly, I don't know what to say," I replied, shrinking inwardly. "It's a ticklish business. Your secret will be safe with me, of course, I'm no Obnoskin, but . . . I don't think I can be of much help to you."

"I see," said Mizinchikov, getting up from his chair, "that you have not had enough of Foma Fomich and the old lady yet, and that fond though you are of your kind, noble uncle, you do not fully realize yet how they torment him. You're new here, after all. But patience! You'll stay the day here tomorrow and by evening you will consent. There's no

other way to save your uncle, don't you see? They'll certainly force the marriage on him. Remember that he may propose tomorrow. It will be too late then: it would be best to risk it tonight."

"I honestly wish you every success, but as for helping you ... I really don't know...."

"Don't bother to explain. Let's leave it till tomorrow," said Mizinchikov with a mocking smile. "*La nuit porte conseil.* Good-bye. I'll be here early in the morning; think the matter over in the meantime."

He turned and left the room, whistling a tune.

I went out after him for a breath of fresh air. The moon was not up yet; the night was dark, warm and close. No leaf stirred. Though I felt dreadfully tired, I wanted to take a stroll, to clear my head and sort out my thoughts, but before I had gone ten paces I stopped short because I heard Uncle's voice. He was going into the lodge with someone, to whom he was speaking very excitedly. I turned back at once and called him. The man with Uncle was Vidoplyasov.

XI

I AM COMPLETELY BAFFLED

"Uncle!" I said. "You've come at last!"

"My friend, I've been dying to see you myself. I'll just finish with Vidoplyasov and then we'll talk to our heart's content. There's so much I have to tell you."

"What, with Vidoplyasov first? Oh don't bother with him, Uncle."

"I won't be longer than five or ten minutes, and then I'm all yours, Sergei. It's a matter of business, you see."

"I'm sure it must be some rubbish of his," I said vexedly.

"What can I say, my dear friend? He couldn't bother me with his nonsense at a more inopportune moment! Grigory old chap, surely you could have chosen a better time for your complaints? What can I do for you anyway? You, at least,

could take pity on me, old chap. You know, you people have exhausted me, so to say, eaten me alive and whole. I simply cannot cope with them, Sergei." And Uncle made a gesture of utter hopelessness.

"What urgent matter is this that it can't keep till later? And I have to talk to you so, Uncle."

"Ah my dear chap, as it is they're all saying that I show no concern for my people's morals. It wouldn't surprise me if he went and complained to them tomorrow that I didn't hear him out, and then...." He waved in despair again.

"Well then, get through with him quickly. I'll help you if I can. Let's go upstairs. What is it? What does he want?" I asked when we had gone in.

"You see, my dear, he's asking permission to change his surname, he doesn't like it. What d'you think of that?"

"Change his surname? But how? Really, Uncle, allow me to observe, before I hear what he has to say, that it's only your house where such miracles could be performed," I said spreading my arms in amazement.

"Oh, dear chap! I, too, can spread my arms like that, but it won't help me much," Uncle said dejectedly. "Go on, talk to him yourself, try. He's been nagging me for two months now."

"It's an unwarranted name," said Vidoplyasov.

"What's unwarranted about it?" I asked in surprise.

"It just is. It implies all sorts of foulness."

"But why foulness? And how can it be changed? Who changes names?"

"Does anyone have a name like that?"

"I agree your name is rather queer," I went on feeling completely baffled. "But how can it be helped now? Didn't your father have the same name?"

"True it is that it's through my father I have started on my eternal sufferings in this manner, since I am destined to accept much mockery and endure many sorrows because of my name," replied Vidoplyasov.

"Uncle, I bet that Foma Fomich had a hand in this," I cried in vexation.

"Oh no, my dear, oh no, you're wrong there. Foma is indeed a benefactor of his. He's taken him on as his secretary, that's all the duties he has. He did develop his mind, of course, instil nobleness into his soul, so that he even came to see the light, in a manner of speaking. Look, I'll tell you everything...."

"Precisely," Vidoplyasov broke in. "Foma Fomich is my true benefactor, and being my true benefactor, he has enlightened me in my insignificance, wretched worm that I am on this earth, and so it was through him I first came to understand my fate."

"You see, Sergei my boy, you see, how it is," Uncle went on, hurrying over the words as usual. "He first lived in Moscow, since early childhood he was in the service of a certain teacher of calligraphy. You ought to see how beautifully he learned to write from that teacher: in colours and gold, with cupids and things all round, you know—in a word, he's an artist. Ilyusha takes lessons from him: I pay him a ruble and a half a lesson. It was Foma himself who decided on the ruble and a half. He goes out to teach in three noble families in the neighbourhood: they pay him too. You see the clothes he has? And besides he writes poetry."

"Poetry? What next!"

"Yes, my dear chap, poetry, and don't you imagine I'm joking, it's real poetry, versification, so to say, and it reads so well, whatever it is he'll instantly describe it in verse form. It's a genuine gift. We simply gasped at the harangue he concocted for Mamma's name's day: he's put some mythology into it, and he's got muses flitting about so vividly that you can actually see their, what d'you call it, you know what I mean—their roundness of form—in other words, it all rhymes perfectly. Foma edited it for him. I don't mind, of course; he's quite welcome as far as I'm concerned. Let him write his poetry, so long as it keeps him out of mischief. Grigory, old chap, I'm saying this to you like a father, you know. Foma found out about this, looked through the poetry, approved of it and took him on as his reader and scribe—educated him, so to say.

It's true what he says that Foma has been a benefactor to him. Well, this gave him some nobly romantic notions and a feeling of independence, you know—Foma explained it all to me, but frankly I've forgotten most of it; all I can say is that I wanted to give him his freedom without Foma's prompting. It's a sort of shame, you know. But Foma objects, he says that he needs him, has grown fond of him, and what is more he says there's more honour to me if I have poets among my own serfs, that some baron or someone lived like that somewhere and that it's *en grand*. Well if it's *en grand* let it be *en grand*. I'm beginning to feel some respect for him already, you know, my dear chap. It's only the way he behaves himself now. The worst of it is that he's put on such airs with his poetry writing that he won't even deign to talk to any of the servants. No offence meant, Grigory, I'm saying this to you like a father. He promised to marry a certain girl as long ago as last winter: Matryona, one of the house servants, a very nice girl, you know, honest, hard-working, and cheerful. But no, he won't do it now, he says he doesn't want to and that's that, he's broken it off. He's either developed a swelled head, or he's decided to rise in the world first and then seek a bride elsewhere."

"It's more on Foma Fomich's advice," Vidoplyasov remarked, "because he's my true well-wisher."

"Oh, naturally, Foma Fomich must be in everything," I could not help saying.

"Ah, my dear chap, that's quite beside the point," Uncle hastened to cut me short, "you see how it is: they won't let him alone now. That girl is spirited and bold and she's roused everyone against him: they tease and plague him, even the servants' children treat him like a sort of clown."

"It's more through Matryona," Vidoplyasov put in, "because Matryona is in truth a fool, and being in truth a fool and moreover a woman uncontrolled in temperament, it is through her I have entered upon this life of suffering."

"Ah, Grigory old chap, didn't I tell you," Uncle said with a look of reproach at Vidoplyasov. "You see, Sergei, they've

made up something nasty to rhyme with his name. He came to me complaining and asking me to do something to change his name because of its inelegant sound which has been worrying him for a long time."

"It's not an ennobled name," Vidoplyasov put in.

"Oh do keep quiet, Grigory. Foma, too, has approved of it ... or rather he didn't exactly approve, but you see, there's this to consider: what if his verses are put in print as Foma plans it, I mean just in case, a name like that might be unfortunate, don't you think?"

"D'you mean he wants to get his verses published, Uncle?"

"Yes, of course, my dear chap. It's all been settled; I'm to stand the expense. The title page will say that he's so and so's serf, and in the preface the author will thank Foma for giving him an education. It's to be dedicated to Foma. Foma is writing the preface himself. And so imagine if the title page says 'verses by Vidoplyasov'."

"Plaints of Vidoplyasov," the author corrected.

"There, you see! It's plaints into the bargain. Now what sort of a name is Vidoplyasov? It's provoking to one's nicety of feeling, that's what Foma said. All these critics, they say, are so quick to ridicule, take Brambeus, for instance. They're capable of anything. The name alone will give them food for ridicule; they'll give you such a drubbing, that there'll be no healing the bruises—isn't it so? That's what I say too: as far as I'm concerned, he may put any name he likes on the book —a pseudonym, or whatever it's called, I forget, it ends with a 'nym' anyway. But no, he wants me to order all the servants to call him by the new name now and for ever after, so that his name should have a noble sound to go with his giftedness, he says."

"I'm sure you have agreed, Uncle."

"Sergei old chap, I only agreed to put an end to this argument; let him. You know, I had an awful misunderstanding with Foma about it at the time. And so, ever since then, there's been a new name every week, and he invariably chooses something sweet like Oleandrov or Tulipov. Remember, Gri-

gory, you wanted to be called Verny first—Grigory Verny, and then you were the first to take exception to it because some ass went and rhymed it with something silly. You complained and the ass was punished. You spent two weeks looking for a new name, and the number you discarded! And then you finally made up your mind, came to me and requested that everyone call you Ulanov. Now tell me, old chap, could anything be sillier than Ulanov? I did not object, however; I issued a second order to the effect that your name was now Ulanov. Only so I'd be rid of him, old chap," Uncle added, turning to me. "You were Ulanov for three days, and ruined all the walls and window-sills in the summer house practising your Ulanov signature. They had to be repainted afterwards, you know. You used up a whole quire of Dutch paper writing 'Ulanov, Ulanov, Ulanov, Ulanov.' Once again, you were out of luck: they found something to rhyme with Ulanov too. You objected to the rhyme, and changed your name again. What was the name you picked next, I can't remember it now?"

"Tantzev," Vidoplyasov replied. "If through my name I am destined to sound like a dancer, let it at least be ennobled in the foreign manner: Tantzev."

"Yes, of course, Tantzev. I agreed to this too, Sergei old chap. But then they rhymed it with something so naughty I can't even say it out loud. He came to me again today, there's something he wants again. I bet he has thought up a new name. Have you or have you not, Grigory, speak up!"

"It's true, I have been wanting for a long time to lay my new name, my ennobled name, at your feet."

"What is it?"

"Esbuketov."

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Grigory? You took the name from a pot of pomade. And you call yourself a man of intelligence. And the time you must have spent thinking about it! It's the name on scent bottles, you know."

"I say, Uncle," I said in a half-whisper, "he's simply a fool, an arrant fool."

"What can I do about it, old chap?" Uncle whispered back. "Everyone says he's clever and all this is a play of his noble emotions."

"Do get rid of him, for heaven's sake."

"Listen, Grigory, I'm busy, you know, old chap, have a heart!" Uncle began in a pleading sort of voice as if even Vidoplyasov was someone he feared. "Come, judge for yourself, can I busy myself with your complaints now? They've hurt you again, you say? Very well: I give you my word of honour that I'll go into it tomorrow, but leave us now. Wait, what is Foma Fomich doing?"

"He has retired. He said that if anyone should ask about him to tell them that he intended to stay up and pray far into the night."

"Hm. Go now, old chap, go!—You see, Sergei, my boy, even he is someone to fear because he's always with Foma. That's why the servants dislike him; he carries tales to Foma about them. He's leaving me alone now, but I can't be sure that he won't go and make up some tale tomorrow. And I've settled everything so nicely there, old chap, I feel quite easy in my mind now. I was so anxious to come to you. At last I'm with you again!" he said with feeling, pressing my hand. "You know, old chap, I was afraid you were really angry and were sure to slip away. I sent someone to keep guard over you. It's all right now, thank God. What did you think of Gavrila, eh? And then Falalei, and you—all the troubles on top of one another. But it's all right now, thank God. We'll talk to our hearts' content, at last. I'll open my heart to you. Don't leave, Sergei, my boy, you are all I have, you and Korovkin."

"But look, Uncle, what is it you have settled, and why should I stay on after all that's happened? I confess my head is simply bursting, you know."

"Is mine whole, do you think? Mine's been spinning in a waltz for the last six months, old chap. But thank God everything's been settled now. To begin with, I've been forgiven, completely forgiven, on all sorts of conditions of course; but I'm afraid of almost nothing now. Sashenka has also been for-

given. Sashenka, you know, with her ardent little heart, got carried away a little, you know, but her dear heart is pure gold! I'm proud of that little girl, Sergei. May the Lord's mercy be always with her. They've forgiven you as well, and d'you know how far they went? You may do whatever you please, go into any of the rooms and into the garden, even if there are visitors, in short, you may do whatever you please; on one condition, though, that you shan't say anything in front of Mamma of Foma Fomich tomorrow—that's an indispensable condition, you're not to utter a sound, I've already promised on your behalf—you'll just listen to what your elders . . . that is, what the others have to say. They said you were too young. Don't mind, Sergei, you really are young. Anna Nilovna says so too."

I was indeed too young and proved it there and then by blazing up with indignation at these humiliating conditions.

"Listen, Uncle," I cried, all but choking with anger, "just tell me one thing and set my mind at rest: am I in a proper madhouse or not?"

"There you go, old chap, criticizing right away! Can't refuse yourself the pleasure, can you?" Uncle replied in grieved tones. "It's not a madhouse at all, tempers were lost on both sides, that's all. You didn't behave very well either, old chap, you must admit that, you know. D'you remember what you said to him, a man whose age commands respect, so to say?"

"People like he have no age that commands respect, Uncle."

"Now that's really going too far, old chap, that smacks of free-thinking. I myself am not averse to some reasonable free-thinking, old chap, but this, passes all bounds, I mean to say, you surprise me, Sergei."

"Don't be angry, Uncle, I'm sorry. It's you I'm saying sorry to, as for your Foma Fomich. . . ."

"There you go, *my* Foma Fomich. Ah, Sergei old chap, don't judge him so harshly: he's a misanthrope, that's all, it's a disease with him. You can't be too exacting with him. But then he's a noble-minded man, why, he's the noblest-minded of men! You saw it yourself this afternoon, he simply glowed

with it. And if he goes into one of his fits occasionally, it isn't worth worrying about. Doesn't it happen to everyone?"

"Why, Uncle, on the contrary, who does it happen to?"

"Ah, you're off again! There's not enough kindliness in you, Sergei my boy, you don't forgive easily."

"Very well, Uncle, very well, let's leave it. Tell me, have you seen Nastasya Yevgrafovna?"

"Ah, old chap, the whole business started because of her. Look here, Sergei, this is the first and foremost thing: we've all decided to go and wish Foma a happy birthday tomorrow, because tomorrow really is his birthday. Sashenka is a good girl, but she is mistaken, and so we'll all go, the whole crowd of us, early in the morning, before service. Ilyusha will recite a verse, it will be like pouring oil upon troubled waters—it will flatter him, I mean. Ah, if you too came with us and wished him a happy birthday! He'd forgive you altogether perhaps. Wouldn't it be splendid if you two made it up! Don't bear malice, old chap, you've wronged him too, my boy. He's the worthiest of men!"

"Uncle! Uncle!" I cried, my patience completely exhausted. "I'm trying to talk on a serious matter with you, and you.... I'm asking you again, do you know what Nastasya Yevgrafovna is going through?"

"Indeed I do, old chap, but why are you shouting at me? It was because of her that the whole rumpus started this afternoon. Or rather not this afternoon at all, for it started a long time ago. I just didn't want to tell you about it beforehand, not to frighten you, because they simply wanted to turn her out, and they insisted that I, too, should tell her to go. You can imagine my position. Oh, but it's all right now, everything has been settled. You see—I'll confess everything to you—they thought I was in love with her and wanted to marry her: in other words that I was anxious to ruin myself, for indeed it would have been ruining myself: I had it all explained to me ... and so, in order to save me, they decided to turn her out. It was all Mamma's idea, but Anna Nilovna insisted more than the rest. Foma has not said anything yet. But now

I've undeceived them all, and, in fact, I've already announced that you are formally engaged to Nastenka, which is why you came. Well, this allayed their fears somewhat, and she's been allowed to stay, not for good of course, she's on probation, but she's staying anyway. You even went up in everyone's opinion when I told them you had come to propose. Mamma, at least, seemed to stop worrying. Anna Nilovna alone is still carping. I really don't know what I could do to please her. And honestly, what is she after, this Anna Nilovna of ours?"

"Uncle, you are deluding yourself terribly! Do you know that Nastasya Yevgrafovna is going away tomorrow, that is if she has not gone yet? Do you know that her father came today for the express purpose of taking her away? Her mind is definitely made up; she told me so herself, and asked me to say good-bye to you for her. Do you know this or not?"

Uncle stood rooted to the spot; his mouth fell open in amazement. I fancied he shuddered and a moan escaped from his heart.

Without wasting a moment, I quickly told him of the conversation I had had with Nastenka, of my proposal, her flat refusal, and her anger at Uncle for having dared to summon me by letter; I explained to him that she was hoping to rescue him from the marriage with Tatyana Ivanovna by going away —in short, I held nothing back; indeed, I made a point of stressing all that was unpleasant in the news. I wanted to shock Uncle into taking some decisive measures—and I succeeded. He cried out and clutched his head in his hands.

"Where is she, do you know? Where is she now?" he brought out at last, pale with alarm. "And I, the fool, came here with an easy mind, believing that everything had been settled," he added in despair.

"I don't know where she is now, but when all the shouting began, she went into the house: she wanted to say all this in front of everyone. I expect they didn't let her in."

"No wonder they didn't! The havoc she'd raise there! Ah, the dear, hot-headed, pround girl! Where will she go now,

where? And you, you're a fine fellow, too! Why did she turn you down? Rubbish! You had to make her like you. Why didn't she think you likable? Oh, answer me, for God's sake, why don't you say something?"

"But Uncle! How can you ask such questions?"

"But things can't be left like that either. You must, you simply must marry her. Why else should I have made you come from St. Petersburg? You must make her happy. They're turning her out of the house now, but once she's your wife, my own niece, they won't. Because where can she go? What will happen to her? Another governess's post? But that's sheer senseless rubbish, you know, this being a governess. What will they live on while she's looking for a position? The old man has nine mouths to feed, they're starving as it is. Neither she nor her father will take a copper piece from me if she leaves because of this foul gossip. And think of the horror of leaving like that! There'll be a row here, I know that. She's taken all her salary in advance long ago for her family needs: she supports them, you know. Well, supposing, I do recommend her as a governess, supposing I do find one of those honest and noble families ... but the deuce of it is, where am I to find those honourable, truly honourable people? I dare say there are some, I dare say there are plenty of them, we shouldn't be ungrateful, but it's a risk, my friend: can one trust people? Besides, poverty breeds mistrust: poor people always fancy that they're being forced to humble themselves to pay for their bread and board. They'll insult her: she is proud and then ... what then? And what if some cad of a seducer turns up, on top of all this? She'll scorn him, I know she will, but then he will have insulted her already, the cad! Disgrace, a shadow, suspicion may sully her good name just the same, and then.... My head is bursting! Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Uncle, forgive me for this one question," I said solemnly. "Do not be angry with me, try to understand that your answer to this question may decide a great deal. In a way, I even have the right to demand an answer from you, Uncle."

"What is that? To what question?"

"Tell me as though you were in the presence of God, frankly and honestly: don't you feel that you are a little in love with Nastasya Yevgrafovna and would like to marry her? Think for a moment: that is why they are persecuting her, you know."

Uncle made a sharp gesture of the most violent impatience.

"I? In love? With her? Why, they must have all gone out of their minds, or they're all plotting against me. Why did I send for you then if it wasn't to prove to all of them that they'd gone out of their minds. Why do I want you to marry her then? I? In love? With her? They've all gone crazy, that's all."

"If that is so, Uncle, allow me to speak my mind. I solemnly declare that I see nothing wicked at all in this suggestion. On the contrary, since you love her so, you'd make her happy, and may God grant it. May God grant you love and counsel."

"Stop, what are you saying!" Uncle cried with something like horror. "It surprises me that you can speak of this so calmly ... and ... altogether, old chap, you're given to hasty conclusions, I've noticed that trait in you before. Now, isn't the thing you've just said senseless? Tell me, how could I marry her when I look upon her as my daughter, and in no other way? Why, I'd actually be ashamed to look upon her differently, it would actually be sinful. I'm an old man, and she's a budding flower. Foma himself has explained it all to me in these very words. My heart is burning with fatherly love for her, and you go and suggest marriage. In her gratitude she'd accept me, I dare say, but then she'd despise me afterwards for taking advantage of her gratitude. I'd ruin her life and lose her affection. Why, I'd give her my very soul, my darling little girl. I love her as I do Sashenka, even more, I'll confess to you. Sashenka is my daughter by right, by law, but my love has made Nastenka a daughter to me. I rescued her from poverty and brought her up. Katya, my late angel, loved her, it was her will that I should be a father to her. I gave her an education: she speaks French, there's the piano, books, and everything. Have you noticed what a dear smile she has? It's

as if she's laughing at you, and yet she's not laughing at you at all, but loves you. And so I thought, you see, that you'd come and propose to her, it would convince them that I had no intentions towards her, and they'd stop spreading all those nasty things about her. She'd stay with us here in peace and quiet, and we'd all be so happy! You are my children, both of you, almost orphans both of you, both of you brought up in my care.... I would love you, how well I'd love you! I'd live for you, I'd never part with you: I'd follow you everywhere. Ah, we could be so happy! Why must people be mean and spiteful, why do they hate one another? If only I could make them all see reason! If only I could go and reveal to them the whole truth that's in my heart! Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Yes, Uncle, yes, it's all very well, only she has refused me, you know."

"She has! Hm. D'you know, I had a feeling she'd refuse you," he said thoughtfully. "But no!" he cried, "I don't believe it. It cannot be. In that case everything will collapse! You must have worded your proposal imprudently, or you may have offended her even; you didn't try any vulgar compliments, did you? Tell me once more exactly the way it was, Sergei."

I repeated the whole conversation in minute detail. When I got to the point where Nastenka said she was hoping to save Uncle from Tatyana Ivanovna by going away, he smiled bitterly.

"To save me!" he said. "To save me till tomorrow morning!"

"You're not trying to tell me, Uncle, that you *are* going to marry Tatyana Ivanovna?" I cried in alarm.

"How else could I bribe them not to turn Nastenka out tomorrow? I'm going to propose tomorrow; I've given my solemn oath."

"You will do it, Uncle?"

"What can I do, old chap, what can I do! It's breaking my heart, but I will do it. I'm proposing tomorrow; they want it to be a quiet wedding, a family affair, but it's really best to

make it a family affair, old chap. You'll probably be best man. I've already hinted about it to them, so they can't possibly send you packing until then. What can I do, old chap? They say, 'You need wealth for your children.' What won't one do for the children? I'd turn somersaults for them, especially since this, when you come to think of it, is only fair perhaps. After all, I must do something for the family, you know. I can't be a sponger for ever."

"But, Uncle, she's insane!" I cried impulsively, and my heart flinched in pain.

"Come now, why call her insane? She's not insane at all, she's gone through a lot, you know. What can I do, old chap, I'd rather have one that was sane, of course. And yet there are all kinds among the sane ones too. If you only knew how kind she is, how noble!"

"Oh my God, he's reconciled himself to that thought too," I said in despair.

"But what else can I do, if not this? They're doing it for my own good, and then I've always known that sooner or later I shouldn't be able to beg off: they'd make me marry someone. So it's best to agree now, rather than start another quarrel about it. I'll be quite frank with you, Sergei old chap: in a way I'm even glad. Once I've decided, let it be so, at least it's a load off my mind, I feel easier somehow. I already had an almost easy mind when I left the house just now. Such is my fate, it seems. But the main point I've gained is that Nastenka will remain with us. I only agreed on this condition, you know. And now *she* herself wants to run away. Oh no, that will not be!" Uncle cried and stamped his foot. "Listen, Sergei," he added with a resolute air, "wait for me here, don't go anywhere, I'll be back in a flash."

"Where are you going, Uncle?"

"I'll try and see her, Sergei. Everything will be cleared up, believe me, everything will be cleared up and . . . and . . . and you'll marry her, I give you my word of honour."

Uncle quickly left the room and went into the garden, not the house. I watched him from the window.

XII

CATASTROPHE

I was alone. My position was unbearable: my suit had been rejected, yet Uncle was practically forcing the marriage on me. My thoughts were tangled and confused. I could not rid my mind of Mizinchikov and his proposal. Uncle had to be saved at all costs. It even occurred to me to go and find Mizinchikov and tell him everything. But where had Uncle gone, I wondered. He told me he was going to look for Nastenka, and yet he had gone into the garden. Suspicion of clandestine meetings flashed through my mind, and a most disagreeable feeling stung my heart. I remembered Mizinchikov talking about a clandestine affair. After a moment's reflection, I thrust all my suspicions aside indignantly. Uncle was above deception—that was obvious. My anxiety grew with every minute. Without conscious thought I left the house and turned my steps into the heart of the garden, following the same path which Uncle had just taken. The moon was rising. I knew the garden thoroughly and had no fear of losing my way. I came to the old summer house, a secluded place on the edge of the old, overgrown pond, and stopped, riveted to the spot: I thought I heard voices inside. I cannot express how strangely vexed I felt. I was convinced it was Uncle and Nastenka, but I walked on towards the summer house, quelling my conscience, just in case, with the fact that I was striding on as before and was not trying to steal up on them. Suddenly there was the distinct sound of a kiss, followed by some excited voices, and immediately afterwards a woman's piercing scream. The next moment, a woman in a white dress ran out of the summer house and flashed past me like a swallow. They must have seen me from the summer house, for I think I saw her hiding her face in her hands so as not to be recognized. Great was my astonishment, however, when I recognized Obnoskin in the cavalier who emerged after the frightened lady—that self-same Obnoskin who, Mizinchikov said, had left long ago. Obnoskin, for his part, grew terribly confused on seeing me: all his self-confidence had vanished,

"I beg your pardon, but I ... I never expected to see you here," he said, smiling and stammering.

"Neither did I expect to see you," I replied in mocking tones, "especially since I was told that you were no longer here."

"No ... not really ... I took Mamma a little way. But may I appeal to you as the most honourable man in the world?"

"What about?"

"There are situations, you cannot but agree, when a truly honourable man is forced to appeal to all that is honourable in another, a truly honourable man.... I hope I'm making myself clear."

"Your hope is vain: I do not understand a thing."

"Did you see the lady who was with me in the summer house?"

"I saw her but I did not recognize her."

"Ah, you did not! I shall soon call this lady my wife."

"Congratulations. But what can I do for you?"

"Just one thing: keep the fact that you saw me with this lady in deepest secrecy."

"Who could it be?" I wondered, "surely not...."

"I really don't know," I told Obnoskin. "I trust you will forgive me, but I cannot give you my word."

"Oh no, for the love of God, please," begged Obnoskin. "Think of my position: it's a secret. You too may become engaged one day, then I, too, on my part...."

"Sh! someone's coming."

"Where?"

A man's vague shape slipped past some thirty paces from us.

"It ... it must be Foma Fomich!" whispered Obnoskin, his whole body trembling. "I know him by his walk. Good Lord! There are more footsteps coming from that direction. Listen.... Good-bye, thank you and ... I entreat you."

Obnoskin disappeared. A minute later Uncle suddenly materialized, appearing from nowhere, it seemed.

"Is that you?" he called to me. "All is lost, my boy, all is lost!"

I noticed that he too was trembling all over.

"What is lost, Uncle?"

"Come with me," he said gasping and, taking a tight hold on my hand, pulled me along. He did not say a word all the way back to the lodge, nor did he let me speak. I expected to hear something out of the ordinary, and was not far wrong. When we came to my room, he fainted: he was as white as a corpse. I quickly dashed some water over him. "Something very awful must have happened," I thought, "to make a man like him faint."

"Uncle, what is the matter?" I asked him when he came to.

"All is lost, Sergei my boy. Foma caught me in the garden with Nastenka, just as I was kissing her."

"You were kissing her! In the garden!" I cried, staring at Uncle in amazement.

"In the garden, old chap, God led me into temptation. I went there because I simply had to see her. I wanted to tell her everything, to make her see reason, about you, I mean. And there she was, she'd been waiting for me for a whole hour beside the broken bench, beyond the pond. She often comes there when she has to talk to me."

"Often, do you say?"

"Yes, quite often, old chap. Lately, we've been meeting almost every night. They must have been spying on us, I know now that they did, and I know that it's all Anna Nilovna's doing. And so we stopped meeting for a while: we did not see each other for about four days, but tonight it was necessary; you saw for yourself how dire the need was, how else could I have told her? I went there, hoping to meet her, and there she was, waiting for me for a whole hour: she had something to tell me too."

"Oh Lord, what lack of caution! You knew you were being watched, didn't you?"

"But, Sergei my boy, it was a case of emergency: there was so much we had to tell one another. I hardly dare look at her in the daytime: she looks one way and I the other on purpose, as if I'm unaware she exists at all. And when night falls we meet and talk to our hearts' content."

"Well, what happened next, Uncle?"

"Before I had said two words—you know how it is—my heart began to throb and tears filled my eyes: I tried to talk her into marrying you, and she said to me, 'It must be that you don't love me, it must be that you see nothing,' and all at once she flung herself into my arms, embracing me, weeping and sobbing. 'It's you alone I love,' she said, 'and I won't marry anyone else. I've loved you for a long time, but I won't marry you either, I'll go away tomorrow and take the veil'."

"Good Lord, did she really say that? Well, what next, tell me, Uncle, go on!"

"I looked up and there was Foma! Where did he spring from, I don't know. Could he have been hiding behind a bush and biding his time?"

"The cad!"

"My heart sank. Nastenka turned to run, and Foma Fomich silently walked past us and shook his finger at me—can you imagine the row there'll be tomorrow, Sergei?"

"Oh, easily!"

"Do you understand," he cried in despair, leaping to his feet, "do you understand that they want to ruin her, disgrace and dishonour her: they're looking for a pretext to pile infamy on her and turn her out; and they've got the pretext now! They did say, you know, that she was having a low affair with me! The cads, you know, they said that she was having an affair with Vidoplyasov. It was Anna Nilovna who said all this. And what will happen now? What will happen tomorrow? Will Foma tell?"

"He certainly will tell, Uncle."

"And if he tells, if he tells," he said biting his lip and clenching his fists, "but no, I refuse to believe it! He won't tell, he'll understand ... he's a man of honour. He'll spare her."

"Whether he spares her or not," I replied resolutely, "is beside the point. It is your duty to propose to Nastasya Yevgrafovna at once, tomorrow."

Uncle stared at me fixedly.

"Uncle, do you realize that if this story is spread abroad you will have dishonoured the girl? Do you realize that you have to act quickly to avert disaster, that you have to face them all bravely and proudly, announce your engagement, ignore their arguments, and grind Foma into dust should he say something against her?"

"My friend!" cried Uncle. "I was thinking about that as I walked here."

"And what did you decide to do?"

"My decision is unshakable. My mind was made up before I started speaking to you."

"Bravo, Uncle."

I embraced him impulsively.

We talked for a long time. I dwelt on all the considerations, and the pressing need to marry Nastenka, which, I must say, he realized even better than I did. Glad for Uncle's sake, I was stirred to eloquence. I spurred him on, for he would never rise to action himself. However, if it was a point of honour or duty, he would carry it through religiously. Nevertheless I simply failed to see how the matter could be settled. I knew and blindly believed that Uncle would never go back on what he once accepted as his duty; still, I could not quite believe that he would have the strength to revolt against the household. And so I did my best, with all the ardour of youth to inspirit and influence him.

"Especially, especially now that everything has been decided and your last lingering doubts are gone," I said. "Nastasya Yevgrafovna loves you. You did not expect it to happen, but as a matter of fact everyone saw it and noticed it before you did. Surely you would not let this pure love turn into shame and disgrace for her?" I went on in loud tones.

"Never! My friend, is it possible that I shall be so happy at last?" Uncle cried, embracing me. "But how could she come to love me and for what? for what? There doesn't seem to be anything about me. I'm an old man compared to her: that's something I never expected, my angel, angel mine! Listen,

Sergei, you asked me if I was not in love with her: did you have something in mind or not?"

"Uncle, I only saw that you loved her as much as it is possible to love: that you loved her and yet you did not know it yourself. It was obvious! You sent for me, you wanted me to marry her only so that she'd become your niece and be near you always."

"And you ... do you forgive me, Sergei?"

"Ah, Uncle!"

He embraced me again.

"Mind now, Uncle, everyone is against you: you must revolt and stand up to all of them no later than tomorrow."

"Yes, yes, tomorrow," he repeated rather pensively. "And, you know, we'll do it manfully, in a spirit of true nobleness and strength of character ... that's the word ... strength of character.

"Don't flinch, Uncle."

"I shan't, Sergei my boy. The only thing is, I don't know how to begin, how to tackle it."

"Don't think about it, Uncle. Tomorrow will decide everything. Think no more about it today. The more you do the worse it will be. And if Foma begins to talk—turn him out of the house at once and grind him into dust."

"Couldn't we possibly manage without turning him out? This is what I've decided to do, old chap: I'll go to him early tomorrow, at the break of day, and I'll tell him everything, the way I've just talked to you: he cannot but understand—he's noble, the noblest of men! But this is what worries me: what if Mamma has already told Tatyana Ivanovna that I was going to propose to her tomorrow? That would be really bad, you know."

"Don't worry about Tatyana Ivanovna, Uncle."

I told him about seeing her and Obnoskin in the summer house. Uncle showed extreme surprise. I did not say a word about Mizinchikov.

"A phantasmagoric person, a truly phantasmagoric person!" he cried. "Poor soul. They flatter her, and want to take ad-

vantage of her simplicity. Surely not Obnoskin? Why, he's gone, you know. Odd, it's awfully odd. I'm astounded, Sergei. We've got to investigate this no later than tomorrow and take measures. But are you quite sure it was Tatyana Ivanovna?"

I told him that although I did not see her face I had my reasons for being quite sure it was Tatyana Ivanovna.

"Hm! He couldn't have been carrying on with one of the maids and you took her for Tatyana Ivanovna? Perhaps it was Dasha, the gardener's daughter, a naughty girl. She's been caught before, that's why I'm saying it. Anna Nilovna has spied her out. But on second thought, no. He said he was contemplating marriage, did he? It's odd, very odd!"

We parted at last. I embraced and blessed Uncle.

"Tomorrow, tomorrow," he kept saying, "everything will be decided before you're up tomorrow. I'll go to Foma and do the chivalrous thing, I'll tell him everything as if he were my own brother, I'll reveal the innermost workings of my heart to him. Go now, Sergei my boy. You're tired, go to bed. As for me, I don't suppose I'll sleep at all tonight."

He left me. I went to bed at once, tired and worn out to the extreme. It had been a difficult day. My nerves were in a bad way and I fitfully started awake several times before I finally settled down to sleep. The impressions I carried into my sleep with me were strange enough, and yet their strangeness faded into insignificance compared to the queerness of my awakening the following morning.

PART TWO

I

PURSUIT

My sleep was sound and dreamless. Suddenly I felt as though a ten-pood load was pressing on my feet. I cried out and awoke. It was already day: the sun was shining bright into my window. On my bed, or rather on my legs, sat Mr. Bakhcheyev.

It was he, there was no doubt about it. Freeing my legs with difficulty, I sat up in bed and stared at him with the dull bewilderment of one who is not quite awake.

"You'd show surprise, would you!" cried the fat man. "Why are you staring at me like that? Get up, man, get up, I've been shaking you for half an hour. Wake up, will you!"

"What's up? What time is it?"

"It's early, man, but our Fevronia's slipped away before light. Get up, we're going after her."

"What Fevronia?"

"Our Fevronia, the simpleton, you know, she slipped away before daybreak! I only popped in for a minute to wake you up, and here I've been wasting hours on you! Get up, man, your uncle is waiting for you. We're going to enjoy this blessed holiday!" he added in a voice tinged with malicious irritation.

"But who and what are you talking about?" I asked impatiently, although the truth was beginning to dawn on me. "It's not Tatyana Ivanovna, you mean, is it?"

"Who else? Of course it's her. I told them, I warned them, but they wouldn't listen. And now she's gone and given us this nice surprise on a happy holiday. This love business has unhinged her, but it's an obsession with her. Bother her! And the other one, with his wretched goatee, what d'you think of him?"

"Has she gone off with Mizinchikov?"

"Oh, dash and bother it! Wake up, man, sober up for this great and blessed day at least! You must have had one too many at dinner last night if it's still fermenting in you. What has Mizinchikov got to do with it? It's Obnoskin and not Mizinchikov at all. Ivan Ivanich Mizinchikov is a decent man, he's coming with us after her now."

"What are you saying!" I cried, actually springing up in surprise. "Could it be Obnoskin?"

"Oh bother the man," the fat man replied, jumping off the bed. "I've come to tell him the news, thinking he is a man of education, and he doubts my word! Listen, if you want to come with us, get up and put your trousers on; I shan't wag my tongue with you any longer, as it is I've wasted a lot of precious time on you."

He walked out, highly indignant.

Staggered by the news, I leapt out of bed, dressed hurriedly, and ran downstairs. I went quietly up the front porch, thinking I'd find Uncle in the house where everyone seemed to be still asleep, unaware of what had happened, and in the hall I came across Nastenka. She wore a morning *peignoir* or a dressing gown, or something, hastily donned. Her hair was in disarry: one could see that she was just out of bed and seemed to be waiting for someone in the hall.

"Tell me, is it true that Tatyana Ivanovna has gone off with Obnoskin?" pale and frightened, she spoke hurriedly in a breaking voice.

"They say it is. I'm looking for Uncle: we want to go after them."

"Oh, hurry and bring her back! Her life will be ruined if you don't bring her back!"

"But where is Uncle?"

"He must have gone to the stables; they're getting the carriage ready. I was waiting for him here. Listen, tell him that I definitely want to leave this very day: my mind is quite made up. Father will take me away; if I can, I'll go now. All is finished now, all is lost!"

She herself looked lost as she said this and suddenly she burst into tears. I was afraid she was going to have a fit of hysterics.

"Oh don't," I begged her. "It's all for the best, you'll see. What's the matter, Nastasya Yevgrafovna?"

"I don't know what is the matter with me," she said, gasping for breath and pressing my hands without knowing it. "Tell him...."

Just then we heard a noise behind the door to the right.

She dropped my hand and, breaking off her speech in alarm, ran away upstairs.

I found the whole company, that is Uncle, Bakhcheyev and Mizinchikov, in the backyard close to the stables. Fresh horses were being harnessed into Bakhcheyev's carriage. All was in readiness for departure, they were only waiting for me.

"Here he is," cried Uncle on seeing me. "Have you heard, old chap?" he added with an odd sort of expression on his face.

His eyes, voice, and movements showed fright, confusion and at the same time something not unlike hope. He knew that his fortune had undergone a complete change.

I was initiated into all the details at once. After a very poor night's sleep Mr. Bakhcheyev had started out from his home at daybreak in order to attend early matins at the monastery which was about five versts from his village. Just as he was about to turn off the main road towards the monastery, he suddenly saw a tarantass coming towards him at full speed and in that tarantass sat Tatyana Ivanovna and Obnoskin. Tatyana Ivanovna's face was tear-stained and she seemed frightened; she cried out and stretched out her arms to Mr. Bakhcheyev as though imploring him to protect her—or so his story implied. "And that cad with the wretched goatee," he added, "sat there more dead than alive, trying to hide. But no fear, brother, you can't hide from me!" Quick to act, Mr. Bakhcheyev had turned back to the main road and had galloped to Stepanchikovo to wake up Uncle, Mizinchikov and, finally, myself. It was immediately decided that they must be pursued.

"Obnoskin, eh? Obnoskin, eh?" Uncle said staring hard at me as if there was something else he wanted to communicate to me at the same time, "who'd have expected it of him!"

"Any sort of meanness could always have been expected of that base character!" Mizinchikov cried with genuine indignation, and turned away at once to avoid my eyes.

"Well, are we starting or aren't we? Or shall we stand here all day and tell each other stories?" Mr. Bakhcheyev cut in, as he climbed into the carriage.

"Let's be off, let's be off!" Uncle exclaimed.

"Everything is for the best, Uncle," I whispered to him. "You see how splendidly everything has been settled now?"

"Come, old chap, don't sin against truth. Ah, my friend! They'll simply turn *her* out now to punish her for their failure, don't you see? I have a feeling it will be awful!"

"Look here, Yegor Ilyich, are we going to stay here whispering or shall we start?" Mr. Bakhcheyev called out again. "Or shall we unharness the horses and have a snack instead? What do you say, should we have a glass of vodka perhaps?"

These words were pronounced with such ferocious sarcasm that it was impossible not to meet Mr. Bakhcheyev's demands at once. All got into the carriage and the horses galloped off.

For a while no one said a word. Uncle kept glancing at me meaningfully, but he did not want to say anything to me in front of the others. Now and again he grew pensive, and then, as though awakening, he would shudder and cast anxious looks about him. Mizinchikov appeared calm, smoking a cigar with the dignified air of an unjustly wronged man. As for Bakhcheyev, he did the fretting for all of us. Grumbling under his breath, he glared at everyone and everything with positive indignation, grew red in the face, wheezed, spat over the side of the carriage, and simply could not calm down.

"Stepan Alexeyich, are you sure they've gone to Mishino?" Uncle asked suddenly. "It's twenty versts away, you know, old chap," he added, turning to me, "it's a small village of thirty souls; the old owners recently sold it to a former gubernia official. The most litigious fellow the world has ever produced. At least that's what they say about him, it may be wrong of course. Stepan Alexeyich insists that that's where Obnoskin went and that this official is helping him."

"I should say I do!" cried Bakhcheyev, starting up. "Mishino it is, believe me. Only he may have skipped out of Mishino too by now, Obnoskin, I mean. Small wonder, with us wasting three hours chit-chatting in the yard!"

"Don't worry," Mizinchikov observed. "We'll be there in time."

"Not much hope! He'll stay there and wait for you, I don't think. He's got the jewel box, you know; he'll be gone and away."

"Come, Stepan Alexeyich, come, we'll overtake them," Uncle said. "They haven't had time to do anything yet, you'll see I'm right."

"They haven't had time!" Mr. Bakhcheyev mimicked spitefully. "There's nothing she couldn't do in the time for all her meekness and mildness. 'She's so meek and mild,' they say," he piped in a thin voice as though copying someone. " 'She's known adversity,' and now she's shown us a clean pair of heels, she and her adversity! And now we've got to go chasing after her all over the country with our tongues lolling at this ungodly hour. A man can't be left to say his morning prayers in peace on a holiday. Bother her!"

"But she's not under age, you know," I put in. "She's not a ward. She can't be brought back unless she wants to be. What shall we do then?"

"Of course," Uncle agreed, "but she will want to, I assure you. She's only behaving like this now, but the moment she sees us she'll come back, I guarantee. After all, old chap, we can't leave her at the mercy of fate, to be victimized: it's our duty, so to say."

"She's not a ward, you say," cried Bakhcheyev, turning on me at once. "She's a fool, man, a stupid fool and you talk about her not being a ward. I didn't even want to tell you about her yesterday, but then I walked into her room by mistake the other day, and there she was dancing an écossaise in front of the mirror, arms akimbo! And dressed up like a fashion magazine, too! I went away in disgust. It was then I read her as if she were a book."

"Why condemn her so?" I remarked somewhat timidly. "Everyone knows that Tatyana Ivanovna is not quite well, or, I should better say, she has this mania. To my mind Obnoskin alone is to blame, not she."

"Not quite well! What can you do with a man like that!" the fat man exclaimed, turning purple with anger. "He must have sworn he'd drive me frantic! He's been true to his promise since yesterday. She's a fool, my dear man, I repeat, a capital fool, and you say she's not quite well: she's been Cupid crazy since childhood, and now this Cupid has driven her to the last extreme. As for that chap with the wretched goatee, you may as well forget him. He's probably driving for all

he's worth now, with the loot, chuckling and jingling the money, jingle-bell, jingle-bell."

"Do you really think he'll leave her at once?"

"I should say I do! Will he carry a treasure like that around with him? What use is she to him? He'll fleece her and leave her under a bush somewhere on the road, and off he'll go, leaving her waiting under the bush and sniffing at the pretty little flowers."

"Oh no, Stepan, you're exaggerating things; it won't be like that," Uncle cried. "However, why are you so angry? You surprise me, Stepan, what is it to you?"

"Why, I am a man, am I not? It naturally makes me angry, impersonally angry. I may be saying this because I mean her well, you know.... Oh, may the whole world rot! Why did I come here at all? Why did I turn off the road? What business is it of mine? What business is it of mine?"

Thus ran Mr. Bakhcheyev's plaint; however I was no longer listening to him but fell to thinking of the one we were pursuing—of Tatyana Ivanovna. Here is her life story briefly, which I pieced together at a later date from the most trustworthy sources, and which is essential for better understanding of her adventures. A poor orphan brought up among strangers at an inhospitable home, then a poor girl, then a poor unmarried girl, and finally a poor old maid—Tatyana Ivanovna, in the course of her poor life drained her brimming cup of woe, orphanhood, humiliation and reproaches, and tasted to the full the bitterness of the bread of charity. Cheerful, highly impressionable and frivolous by nature, she managed to endure her bitter lot at first and was even able to laugh sometimes with the most cheerful and carefree laughter; with the years, however, life made its impress on her at last. Little by little Tatyana Ivanovna turned sallow and thin, grew irritable and morbidly impressionable, and plunged into day-dreaming with abandon and unrestraint, frequently giving way to hysterical tears and convulsive sobbing. The fewer the earthly blessings life granted her, the more she deluded and comforted herself with her flights of fancy. The more certainly and inexora-

bly her last realizable hopes passed and, finally, died, the more fascinating became her dreams, which could never be realized. Fabulous wealth, unfading beauty, young men of elegance, wealth and eminence, all of them princes' and generals' sons, who kept their hearts virginally pure for her and who died at her feet from ineffable love, and finally he—a man ideally handsome, with all possible virtues combined in him, passionate and affectionate, an artist, a poet, a general's son—together or in turns—all this began to appear to her not only in her dreams but even and almost in reality. Her mind was already beginning to weaken and give way, overdosed by the opiate of this mysterious, incessant dreaming. And suddenly fate played its worst trick on her. Already draining the dregs of humiliation, amid reality so sad that it crushed her heart, a paid companion to an old, toothless, and most peevish lady in the world, blamed for everything, reproached with every piece of bread she ate, every cast-off rag she wore, insulted by all and sundry, protected by no one, tormented by her woeful existence and, in secret, luxuriating in the sweetness of the craziest of inflamed fancies, she suddenly received news of the death of a distant relative of hers, whose family and next of kin had all died long ago (something she, in her frivolity, had never interested herself in), a queer man who lived the life of a recluse, solitary, cheerless and unnoticed, in some remote place hundreds of versts away, where he engaged in phrenology and usury. And now, as though by a miracle, immense riches suddenly descended in a golden rain and fell at Tatyana Ivanovna's feet: she was her late relative's only lawful heir. She received a lump sum of a hundred thousand rubles in silver. This jest of fate was the end of her. And really, how could a mind already weakened help believing in dreams when they were actually beginning to come true? And so the poor soul took final leave of her last remaining shred of common sense. Her heart palpitating with happiness, she was swept away, beyond recall, into her bewitching world of preposterous fancies and seductive illusions. Away with all considerations, all doubts, all barriers put up by reality, all its

inevitable laws as clear as twice two is four. Thirty-five and the dream of becoming a dazzling beauty; the sad chill of autumnal decline, and all the splendour of love's infinite bliss—this comprised her inner world and there was no discord in it. One dream had come true for once in her life, so why should not all the others? Why should not *he* come too? Tatyana Ivanovna did not reason but simply believed. But while she waited for *him,* for her ideal, eligible young men, knights of different orders and simply knights, officers and civilians, army officers and cavalier guards, noble-born and ordinary poets who had been to Paris or just to Moscow, with and without whiskers, with and without imperials, Spaniards and non-Spaniards (but Spaniards for preference), began to appear to her day and night in numbers so terrifying that those about her became seriously alarmed: it was only a short step to the madhouse. All these beautiful visions clustered about her in a brilliant and enamored train. In her waking hours, in real life, matters continued in the same fantastic manner: whoever she glanced at fell in love with her; whoever walked past, became a Spaniard; if anyone died it was assuredly of unrequited love for her. Unfortunately, the truth of all this was further confirmed to her by people like Obnoskin, Mizinchikov, and dozens of others who were indeed pursuing her with the same intentions. All of a sudden, everyone began to court her favour, pamper, and flatter her. Poor Tatyana Ivanovna did not even wish to suspect that it was all because of her money, but firmly believed that through some magic all people had suddenly become good, and everyone in the world had become cheerful, nice, affectionate, and kind. *He* had not made an appearance yet; and though there was no doubt that *he* would come, her present life was so pleasant, so exciting, and so full of different amusements and treats, that she could easily wait. Tatyana Ivanovna ate sweets, picked the flowers of delight, and read novels. The latter inflamed her imagination even more, and she usually put them aside after reading a page or two. She could not stand reading further for she was carried away into dreamland, inspired by the very first lines, the merest allusion

to romance, or sometimes just the description of a place, a room, or a gown. New gowns, laces, hats, lace caps, ribbons, samples, dress patterns, embroidery designs, sweets, flowers, and lap-dogs were delivered to her in an endless stream. In the maids' room three girls sat stitching all day, while their mistress tried on her bodices and flounces and preened herself before the mirror from dawn till dark and even in the middle of the night. She actually looked younger and prettier after inheriting the money. I do not know to this day through whom she was related to the late General Krakhotkin. I have always been convinced that the general's lady had invented this kinship, in her desire to get Tatyana Ivanovna into her clutches and make Uncle marry her for her money. Mr. Bakhcheyev was right in what he said about Cupid driving Tatyana Ivanovna to the border-line; and Uncle's plan, on learning of her elopement with Obnoskin, to go after her and bring her back by force if necessary, was the most rational. The poor soul was incapable of living unprotected and would perish the moment she fell into the hands of evil people.

It was after nine when we reached Mishino, a poor, small village lying in a sort of hollow, three versts or so away from the main road. Six or seven peasant huts, smoky, dilapidated and barely covered with time-blackened thatching met the traveller with a wistful and unfriendly air. For a quarter of a verst around there was no sight of a flower garden or even a bush. Only a solitary old broom drooped sleepily over a greenish puddle, the so-called pond. A new home like this could hardly have impressed Tatyana Ivanovna too favourably. The landowner's house was new, a long, narrow timber structure, with six windows in a row, and was carelessly thatched. The former official was only just entering upon the role of landowner. Even the yard had not been fenced in yet and only along one side of it there was the beginning of a new wattle fence with the shrivelled hazel-nut leaves still clinging to the twigs. Obnoskin's tarantass stood beside the fence. We descended upon the two guilty ones like a bolt from the blue. Shouts and sobs could be heard through the open window.

A barefooted boy we met in the front hall rushed out and away from us for all he was worth. In the very first room we entered, we found Tatyana Ivanovna, with her face tear-stained, sitting on a long chintz-upholstered ottoman. On seeing us she gave a shrill cry and covered her face with her hands. Beside her stood Obnoskin, a sorry spectacle of embarrassment and fright. He was so taken aback that he rushed forward to shake our hands as if he welcomed our coming. A lady's dress showed behind the partly opened door into the next room: someone was listening and watching through the slit we were not supposed to see. No host or hostess appeared: one would think they were not in the house at all: everyone had gone into hiding.

"Here she is, our traveller! And she's hiding her face in her hands too!" cried Mr. Bakhcheyev, bursting into the room after us.

"Calm yourself, Stepan Alexeyich! It's really indecent. Only Yegor Ilyich has the right to speak now, while we are nothing but outsiders in this matter," Mizinchikov said brusquely.

Uncle cast a stern look at Mr. Bakhcheyev and, ignoring Obnoskin who rushed forward eagerly to shake hands, went up to Tatyana Ivanovna, who was still hiding her face in her hands, and addressed her with unfeigned sympathy and in the gentlest of tones.

"Tatyana Ivanovna, we all love and respect you so, that we came here ourselves to learn of your intentions. Would you care to come back to Stepanchikovo with us? It's Ilyusha's name's day. Mamma is waiting for you with impatience, and as for Sashenka and Nastenka they must have spent the whole morning in tears for you."

Tatyana Ivanovna raised her head timidly, looked at him through her fingers and suddenly, bursting into tears, fell on his breast.

"Oh take me away, take me away from here quickly," she said, sobbing, "quickly, as quickly as you can."

"A-galloping she went but her courage has failed her, eh?" Bakhcheyev hissed nudging me.

"It's all over then," Uncle said drily to Obnoskin, with hardly a look at him. "Tatyana Ivanovna, your arm, please. Let us go."

There was a rustling behind the door: it creaked and opened a little more.

"Judging this from another point of view, however," said Obnoskin, glancing uneasily at the half-open door, "judge for yourself, Yegor Ilyich... your behaviour in my house... and then I greeted you and you would not even answer me, Yegor Ilyich...."

"Your behaviour in *my* house, sir, was unworthy behaviour," Uncle replied with a stern look at Obnoskin. "And this is not your house anyway. You have heard Tatyana Ivanovna say that she refuses to stay here another minute. What more do you want? Not another word, d'you hear, not another word, please. I particularly want to avoid further explanations, and as far as you are concerned, that will only be to your advantage."

But at this, Obnoskin's courage failed him so completely that he blurted out a lot of extraordinary drivel.

"Do not despise me, Yegor Ilyich," he began in a half-whisper, almost weeping from shame and darting glances at the door, evidently afraid of being overheard. "It's not my doing at all, it's Mamma's. I didn't do it because of the money, Yegor Ilyich, I did it just like that; I did it for the money too of course, Yegor Ilyich... but I did it with an honourable aim. I would have made good use of the capital.... I would have helped the poor. I also wanted to promote modern education, I even dreamed of endowing a university scholarship. That's the purpose I wanted to turn the wealth to, Yegor Ilyich and not just anything, Yegor Ilyich...."

Suddenly we all felt extremely embarrassed. Even Mizinchikov blushed and looked away, while Uncle was so confused he did not know what to say.

"Come now, come now," he uttered at last. "Compose yourself, Pavel Semyonich. What's to be done! It might happen to

anyone. Come to dinner if you like, old chap. I'll be glad, glad."

Mr. Bakhcheyev, however, acted differently.

"What, endow a scholarship!" he roared savagely. "His sort endowing a scholarship! He's probably only too eager to rob the first man he sees. He hasn't got a pair of pants to his name and he's thrusting his nose into some scholarship or something! Oh you ragman, you ragman! So you thought you'd won a loving heart? And where is she, your mother, eh? Is she hiding, perhaps? I bet my life she's sitting behind the screen somewhere, or has crawled under the bed from fright."

"Stepan, Stepan!" Uncle cried.

Obnoskin turned red and was about to remonstrate, but before he could open his mouth to speak, the door was pushed wide and in flew Anfisa Petrovna herself, her eyes blazing and her face flushed with anger.

"What's this?" she shouted. "What's going on here? Yegor Ilyich, what do you mean by breaking into a respectable house with your gang, frightening the ladies, and ordering everyone about? What sort of behaviour is this? I'm still in my right mind, you know, Yegor Ilyich. And you, you saphead!" she went on screaming, turning on her son. "Snivelling and whimpering before them already! Your mother is being insulted in her own home, and you stand there gaping! D'you call yourself a decent young man after that? You're a milksop and not a young man after that."

There were no airs and graces of yesterday, not even a lorgnette—Anfisa Petrovna had none of this now. She was a real Fury. Fury without a mask.

The moment Uncle saw her he quickly put his arm through Tatyana Ivanovna's and made for the door with her, but Anfisa Petrovna instantly barred his way.

"You won't leave so easily, Yegor Ilyich!" she shrilled again. "What right have you to take Tatyana Ivanovna away by force? You resent her escaping your filthy toils which you, together with your mamma and that fool Foma Fomich, had

tangled her in. You'd like to marry her yourself for filthy lucre. Thoughts are nobler here, allow me to point out. Tatyana Ivanovna herself placed her trust in my Pavel when she saw what you were plotting against her, how you wanted to ruin her. She herself asked him to save her, so to say, from your toils; she was forced to run away from you in the night—there! That's what you drove her to! Is it not so, Tatyana Ivanovna? And if it is, how dare you break into a respectable nobleman's home with your whole gang and take a noble young lady away by force in spite of her screams and tears? I shan't allow it! I shan't! I haven't gone out of my mind! Tatyana Ivanovna will remain because she wants to. Come, Tatyana Ivanovna, don't listen to them, they are your foes and not your friends. Come, do not be afraid. I shall soon show them out."

"No, no!" Tatyana Ivanovna screamed in alarm. "I don't want to, I don't want to! He's not the husband for me. I don't want to marry your son. He's not the husband for me!"

"Oh, you don't want to!" shrieked Anfisa Petrovna, choking with rage. "You don't want to? You came here and now you don't want to? In that case how dared you deceive us? In that case how dared you give him your promise, how dared you run away with him in the middle of the night, foist yourself upon him, mislead us and cause us expense? My son may have lost a good match because of you! He may have lost a dowry of tens of thousands because of you! Oh no, you'll pay, you'll have to pay now: we have proof—you ran away in the night."

We did not hear this tirade out, however. Closely surrounding Uncle, we all of us together advanced straight upon Anfisa Petrovna, and out on to the porch. The carriage was brought round at once.

"None but scoundrels and dishonourable people behave like that!" Anfisa Petrovna shouted from the porch in a frenzy. "I'll lodge a complaint against you! You'll pay... you're going to a disgraceful house, Tatyana Ivanovna! You cannot

marry Yegor Ilyich; he's keeping a mistress, his governess, right under your nose!"

Uncle trembled, turned pale, bit his lip and rushed away to help Tatyana Ivanovna into the carriage. I walked round to the other side and waited for my turn to get in, when suddenly there was Obnoskin beside me gripping my hand.

"Allow me, at least, to seek your friendship," he said pressing my hand hard, with a desperate expression on his face.

"What do you mean—friendship?" I said, putting my foot on the carriage step.

"Yes, friendship. From the first I saw in you a highly educated man. Do not condemn me. It's Mamma really who induced me, I had nothing to do with it at all. I have a leaning for literature, rather—I assure you; and this is all Mamma's doing."

"To be sure, to be sure," I said. "Good-bye."

We settled down and the horses took off, Anfisa Petrovna's screams and curses following us a long way. Meanwhile, faces we did not know suddenly popped out of all the windows in the house and stared at us with wild curiosity.

We were five in the carriage now; Mizinchikov, however, sat on the coach-box, giving up his seat to Mr. Bakhcheyev, who was now obliged to sit facing Tatyana Ivanovna. She was very glad that we had taken her away, but she was still crying. Uncle did his best to comfort her. But he was sad and pensive: one could see that Anfisa Petrovna's frenzied words about Nastenka had fallen heavily and painfully upon his heart. I must say, though, that our drive back would have ended without any trouble if only we did not have Mr. Bakhcheyev with us.

The moment he settled down opposite Tatyana Ivanovna he grew flustered: he could not look about him calmly, he fidgeted in his seat, reddened like a lobster and rolled his eyes horribly; and when Uncle tried to comfort Tatyana Ivanovna, the fat man lost his temper completely and growled like a bulldog that was being teased. Uncle kept glancing at him

with apprehension. Finally, Tatyana Ivanovna, having noticed the extraordinary state of excitement her vis-à-vis was in, began to peer at him intently; then she glanced at us, smiled, and suddenly, picking up her parasol, gracefully tapped Mr. Bakhcheyev on the shoulder.

"Oh you madman!" she said with charming playfulness and quickly hid her face behind her fan.

This was the last straw.

"What!" roared the fat man. "What's this, madam? So you'd get me too, would you?"

"The madman! The madman!" Tatyana Ivanovna repeated, and then she burst out laughing and clapped her hands.

"Stop!" Bakhcheyev shouted to the driver. "Stop!"

We stopped, Bakhcheyev opened the door and got out.

"What's the matter, Stepan Alexeyich? Where are you off to?" Uncle cried in surprise.

"I've had enough," the fat man replied, shaking with indignation. "Let the whole world rot! I'm too old, madam, to be taken in by your flirtatious advances. I'd rather die on the road, my good woman. Good-bye, madam, *comment vous portez-vous*?"

And he really did start off on foot, the carriage following him at a walk.

"Don't play the fool, Stepan Alexeyich!" Uncle cried losing his patience at last. "Come now, get in, it's time to go home, you know."

"Off with you!" Stepan Alexeyich exclaimed, panting with exertion; he was so fat he had lost the habit of walking.

"Drive on!" Mizinchikov shouted to the driver.

"How can you? Wait, wait," Uncle cried, but the horses had already taken off. Mizinchikov had not miscalculated: the desired effect was immediately forthcoming.

"Stop, stop!" We heard a desperate shriek behind us. "Stop, you robber. Stop, you cutthroat!"

The fat man came up to us at last, exhausted and half dead, with drops of perspiration on his brow, his cap off and his necktie undone. He climbed into the carriage, silently and

glumly, and this time I let him have my seat: at least he would not have to sit facing Tatyana Ivanovna who, throughout all this scene, had laughed heartily and clapped her hands, and during the remainder of the drive threw agitated looks at Stepan Alexeyich. As for the latter, he did not utter a word all the way to the house, but stubbornly kept his eyes fixed on the carriage's rear wheel.

It was already midday when we got back to Stepanchikovo. I went straight to the lodge; the moment I got to my room Gavrila appeared bringing me some tea. I began to question the old man eagerly, but Uncle came in practically on his heels and sent him away at once.

II

NEWS

"I'll only stay a minute, old chap," he began hurriedly. "I hastened to tell you... I've found everything out already. None of them have even been to church this morning, no one but Ilyusha, Sashenka, and Nastenka. Mamma, they say, has been in convulsions. They brought her round by massaging her; they only just managed. And now all must gather in Foma's room, I'm invited also. Only I don't know should I congratulate Foma on his name's day or not—it's a fine point. And then, how will they take all this show, I wonder. It'll be awful, Sergei, my boy, I have a feeling it will."

"On the contrary, Uncle," I hurried to say in my turn. "Things are shaping splendidly. It's quite impossible for you to marry Tatyana Ivanovna now, you know—that alone is worth something. I wanted to explain this to you on the way here."

"Yes, yes, my friend. But it's not that: there is the finger of God in all this, of course, just like you said, but I wasn't thinking about that. Poor Tatyana Ivanovna, the things that happen to her! That scoundrel Obnoskin! However, why do I call him a scoundrel? Wouldn't I be doing the same thing if I

married her? But this is not what I wanted to say though ... Did you hear the thing that shrew Anfisa shouted about Nastenka?"

"I did, Uncle. Do you see now that you must hurry?"

"Certainly, and at all costs!" Uncle replied. "The solemn hour has arrived. There's just one thing we didn't take into consideration last night, old chap; I thought about it all night afterwards: will she want to marry me, that is the question?"

"But, Uncle, she told you herself that she loves you."

"Ah, my dear friend, she did add that she'd never marry me, you know."

"Oh, Uncle, that's nothing but words, and besides the situation is different today."

"D'you think so? No, Sergei old chap, it's a delicate business, awfully delicate. Hm. But d'you know, even though I worried, a sort of happiness tugged at my heart all night. Well, good-bye, I must be off. They're waiting, I'm late as it is. I just dropped in for a few words, you know. Oh, good heavens," he cried coming back. "I've forgotten the main thing. I wrote a letter to Foma, you know."

"When?"

"Last night, and early this morning I sent him the letter with Vidoplyasov. I described everything on two pages, old chap. I told him everything truthfully and frankly—in short, that I must, I absolutely must propose to Nastenka, you see? I implored him not to tell about our rendezvous in the garden, and appealed to the nobleness of his soul to help me with Mamma. It was poorly written of course, but I wrote it from the bottom of my heart and drenched it in tears, so to say."

"What then? No answer?"

"None so far; but this morning, when we were getting ready to start out in pursuit, I met him in the front hall in his night clothes, bedroom slippers, and nightcap—he sleeps in a nightcap; he must have been somewhere. He did not say a word

or even glance at me. I stole a look at his face furtively, you know—it told me nothing."

"Don't trust him, Uncle, he'll play you some foul trick."

"No, no, old chap, don't say that!" cried Uncle, raising his hands in protest. "I'm certain he won't. And besides, this is my last hope, you know. He'll understand, he'll appreciate everything. He's peevish and capricious, I agree, but when it comes to displaying the highest nobleness he'll shine like a pearl... that's it, like a pearl. It's all because you haven't seen him yet at his highest nobleness, Sergei. But, good heavens, if he really does spread yesterday's secret abroad, then... then I don't know what will happen, Sergei. What could one believe in in this world then? But no, he cannot prove such a scoundrel. I'm not worth the sole of his boot. Don't shake your head, old chap, it's true—I'm not worth it."

"Yegor Ilyich! Your mamma is worried about you," Miss Perepelitsina's unpleasant voice came from below. She must have been listening to our conversation under the open window. "They're looking for you all over the house and can't find you."

"Good heavens, I'm late! There'll be trouble," Uncle grew flustered. "My friend, for the love of Christ, get dressed and come there. I thought we'd go together, that's why I came here. I'm coming, Anna Nilovna, I'm coming."

Left alone, I recalled my conversation with Nastenka that morning and was glad I did not tell Uncle about it, for it would have upset him even more. I had a feeling that a great storm was imminent and I failed to see how Uncle could manage to settle his affairs and propose to Nastenka. I repeat, that for all my faith in his honourable intentions, I could not help doubting the outcome.

I had to hurry, however. I considered myself in duty bound to help Uncle, and began to dress at once. But no matter how I hurried, it took me some time because I wanted to be as well turned out as possible. Suddenly Mizinchikov came in.

"I've come to fetch you," he said, "Yegor Ilyich wants you to come at once."

"Let us go."

I was quite ready. We went out.

"What's going on there?" I asked on the way.

"Everyone's at Foma's," Mizinchikov replied. "Foma is not in a pet, but rather pensive and taciturn, and speaks with set teeth. He even kissed Ilyusha, which, needless to say, delighted Yegor Ilyich. He has informed everyone through Miss Perepelitsina earlier today that he was not to be congratulated on his supposed name's day, that he had only wanted to put us to the test. The old lady is still sniffing at her smelling salts, but she's calmed down because Foma is calm. No one's said a word about our adventure as though nothing ever happened. They say nothing because Foma says nothing. He wouldn't admit anyone all morning, although when we were away the old lady begged him for all the saints' sake to come to her room for a conference, and herself tried to break into his: but he locked himself in and replied that he was praying for all mankind or something of the sort. He's up to something: you can see it from his face. But since Yegor Ilyich is incapable of reading faces, he is absolutely delighted with Foma's meekness: he's a perfect child. Ilyusha has learnt a piece of poetry for the occasion, that's why they sent me for you."

"And Tatyana Ivanovna?"

"What about Tatyana Ivanovna?"

"Is she there? With them?"

"No, she's in her own room," Mizinchikov said drily, "resting and weeping. She's ashamed, perhaps. I believe that governess is with her now. What's that? Why, a storm is gathering. Oh, look at the sky!"

"It does look like a storm," I said glancing at the black thunder-cloud on the horizon.

We were then going up the terrace steps.

"What do you think of Obnoskin, eh?" I went on unable to resist the temptation of probing Mizinchikov on this point.

"Don't speak to me about him! Don't remind me of that scoundrel!" he cried, stopping abruptly, flushing and stamping his foot. "He's a fool! A fool! To wreck such an excellent

undertaking and ruin such a brilliant idea! Look here, I was an ass of course, not to see through his tricks, I admit this solemnly, and that is the admission you were after, perhaps. But I swear I might have forgiven him if he had been clever enough to manage it all properly. But he's a fool, a fool. And why does society tolerate and receive such people? Why don't they exile them to Siberia? But no, no fear, they won't outwit me! I've gained some experience now at any rate, and we'll measure our strength yet. I've another idea, which I am thinking over now. Consider this: should I lose my due simply because some fool of an outsider stole my idea and made a mess of the business? After all it's unfair. And then this Tatyana woman simply has to get married, it's what she's there for. And it's precisely because she's not past marrying yet that no one has locked her into the madhouse until now. I'll tell you of my new idea. . . ."

"Later, perhaps," I interrupted him, "because we've already arrived."

"Very well, later, very well," said Mizinchikov, a convulsive smile twisting his lips. "And now. . . . But where are you going? I told you, we're to go straight to Foma Fomich's room. Follow me, you haven't been there yet. You'll see a new comedy . . . since we've gone in for comedy now."

III

ILYUSHA'S PATRON SAINT'S DAY

Foma occupied two large and splendid rooms, which were even better appointed than all the other rooms in the house. Perfect comfort surrounded the great man. The freshly and beautifully papered walls, the flowered silk curtains on the windows, the carpets, the pier-glass, the fire-place, and the smart upholstered furniture, all this bespoke the hosts' affectionate solicitude for Foma Fomich's needs. Pots of flowers stood on the window-sills and on round marble-topped tables

at the windows. In the middle of the study stood a large desk with a top of red cloth and piled high with books and manuscripts. A splendid bronze inkstand and a supply of quills, which were Vidoplyasov's special care, were all supposed to bear witness to Foma Fomich's strenuous mental exercises. Incidentally, Foma composed nothing worth while in all the eight years he occupied this study. Later, when he passed on to the better world, we sorted out his manuscripts and they all proved to be the trashiest of rubbish. For instance, we found the beginning of a historical novel with the scene laid in Novgorod in the 7th century; a hideous poem written in blank verse called "Anchorite in the Churchyard"; there was also a nonsensical discourse on the significance and nature of the Russian muzhik and how to treat him, and finally an unfinished story of society life entitled "Countess Vlonskaya." That was all. And yet Foma Fomich had made Uncle spend a good deal of money every year subscribing to magazines and ordering books for him. Many of these, however, had not even been cut. Later on I often caught Foma reading Paul de Kock, which he hid when anyone was about. A glass door led from the study into the courtyard.

They were expecting us. Foma Fomich sat in an armchair, dressed in some sort of frock-coat that came down to his toes, but still he wore no tie. He was indeed silent and pensive. When we walked in he raised his eyebrows slightly and gave me a searching look. I bowed, he responded with a short nod which, however, was polite enough. The old lady, seeing that Foma Fomich had treated me so graciously, began to smile and nod her head at me. That morning the poor woman could hardly have thought that her treasure would take the news of Tatyana Ivanovna's *mishap* so calmly, and that was why she was in such high spirits now, although she really did have convulsions and swoons that morning. Miss Perepelitsina stood behind her chair as usual, smiling wryly and spitefully with clenched thread-like lips, and rubbing her bony hands. Close to the general's lady sat two ever silent old gentlewomen, who were dependents of the family.

There was also a nun who had wandered in that morning, and the mistress of a neighbouring estate, an elderly lady as devoid of conversation, who had dropped in after church to pay her respects to the general's lady. My aunt, Praskovya Ilyinishna, shrank in a far corner, watching Foma Fomich and Mamma uneasily. Uncle sat in an armchair, his eyes shining with joy. Ilyusha, as pretty as a cherub in his best red shirt and his hair in ringlets, stood before him. Sashenka and Nastenka had taught him a piece of poetry to gladden his father on a day like this with his progress in learning. Uncle was almost moved to tears: Foma's unexpected meekness, Mamma's high spirits, Ilyusha's name's day, and the poetry—all this quite overwhelmed him and in his delight he asked them to send for me so that I, too, might share in everyone's happiness and hear the recital. Sashenka and Nastenka who came in on our heels, stood beside Ilyusha. Sashenka bubbled with laughter and was as happy as a child. Nastenka, though wan and dejected a minute ago, also began to smile as she looked at her. Nastenka had been the only one to meet and reassure Tatyana Ivanovna on return from her journey, and had all this time stayed with her upstairs. Ilyusha, a lively boy, also seemed unable to hold back his laughter as he stood watching his teachers. It looked as if the three had prepared something very funny, which they were now eager to stage. Oh yes, I was forgetting Bakhcheyev. He sat on a chair a little apart, still angry and red, saying nothing, sulking, blowing his nose, and generally playing a rather gloomy part at this family holiday. Yezhevikin fluttered close by; he moved about all over the room, kissing the hands of the general's lady and the lady who had come to call, whispering something into Miss Perepelitsina's ear, fussing about Foma Fomich, and in short, managing everything at once. He, too, was very eager to hear Ilyusha recite, and when I appeared rushed forward to bow me in as a sign of the deepest respect and devotion. His manner did not at all show that he had come there to protect his daughter and take her away from Stepanchikovo for good.

"Here he is!" Uncle cried happily on seeing me. "Ilyusha is going to recite a poem, old chap, I knew nothing about it, it's a real surprise! I'm overwhelmed, old chap, and so I purposely sent for you, and held up the recital until you came. Come, sit beside me. Let's listen now. Foma Fomich, own up, it *was* you who gave them the idea of making this pleasant surprise for their old father, wasn't it? I'll swear it was!"

There was no need for anxiety, one would have thought, if Uncle dared speak in this tone of voice in Foma's room. But the trouble was that Uncle, just as Mizinchikov said, was incapable of divining anything from anyone's face. I glanced at Foma and could not but agree with Mizinchikov that something was forthcoming.

"Do not worry about me, Colonel," Foma replied in the faint voice of a man forgiving his enemies. "I approve of the surprise, of course: it shows that your children are well-behaved and not insensitive. Poetry is good too, if only for one's pronunciation. But it was not poetry that has occupied my mind this morning, Yegor Ilyich: I prayed ... you know it. However, I am ready to listen to poetry as well."

In the meantime, I congratulated Ilyusha on his name's day and kissed him.

"To be sure, Foma, forgive me. I forgot ... though I do believe in your friendship, Foma. Come, Sergei, kiss him once more. Look at the dear boy! Begin now, Ilyusha. What is it about? I expect it's some solemn ode, something of Lomonosov's perhaps?" said Uncle looking proud of himself. He could hardly sit still in his impatience and delight.

"No, Papa, it's not Lomonosov," said Sashenka, suppressing her laughter with an effort, "because you used to be a soldier and had fought the enemy Ilyusha learned a poem about the military. It's the *Siege of Pamba*, Papa."

"The *Siege of Pamba*, eh? I don't seem to remember. What is Pamba, d'you know, Sergei? Must be something heroic."

Uncle put on a proud air once again.

"Begin, Ilyusha," Sashenka ordered.

"*For nine years Don Pedro Gomez,*" began Ilyusha in a small, even and clear voice, without commas or stops, the way children usually recite poetry.

For nine years Don Pedro Gomez
Has been storming Pamba Castle,
Taking nought but milk for sust'nance,
And his army to a man,
All nine thousand brave Castilians
Never broke the vow they'd taken
Eating neither bread nor viands,
Drinking nought but milk alone.

"What's that? What milk is that?" cried Uncle looking at me in bewilderment.

"Carry on, Ilyusha," cried Sashenka.

Every day Don Pedro Gomez
Weeps behind his steely armour
In his impotent frustration.
Now the siege is in its tenth year;
And the evil Moors are gleeful,
While Don Pedro's valiant army
Dwindles down until it numbers
Only nineteen men in all.

"Why, it's sheer nonsense," Uncle cried excitedly. "It's an unheard of business, you know! A whole army dwindling down to nineteen men when it was quite a large corps too! How can it be, old chap?"

But at this Sashenka gave way to her mirth and burst into peals of the most ingenuous, childlike laughter; and though there was nothing so very funny about this, one could not help laughing with her.

"It's a humorous poem, Papa," she exclaimed, awfully pleased with this childish bit of fun. "It's meant like that, it's the author himself who wanted everyone to laugh, Papa."

"Oh, I see, it's humorous," cried Uncle, beaming. "Comic, that is, I thought there was something. That's

exactly what it is: it's humorous. It is amusing, most amusing: starving a whole army on milk because of a vow or something! The very idea of taking such vows! It's very witty, don't you think, Foma? Mamma, it's one of those comic verses, you see, which authors write sometimes, they do, don't they, Sergei? It's most amusing! Well then, Ilyusha, go on, what happened next?"

Nineteen men in all! Don Pedro
Summoned all of them together
And he said to them, "My nineteen,
Let us furl our banners higher,
Let us blow our trumpets louder,
Let us strike our kettledrums, soldiers,
And retreat from Pamba Castle.
Though we've failed to take the fortress,
We can swear by all that's holy
With a clear untroubled conscience
That in all this time we never
Broke the pledge that we had taken:
Never once in all those nine years
Did we any food partake of,
Nought but milk and only milk."

"What a blockhead!" Uncle broke in again. "Consoling himself that he took nothing but milk for nine years! Where's the virtue in this? He'd have done better if he'd eaten a sheep a day and not starved his men. Splendid! Excellent! I see now, I understand: It's a satire or.... What d'you call it, an allegory or something, isn't it? And perhaps it's even aimed at some foreign general," Uncle added turning to me with a meaningful frown and narrowed eyes. "What do you say, eh? It's an innocent, noble satire of course, insulting to no one! Splendid! Excellent! It's noble, that's the main thing. Well, Ilyusha, carry on. Oh you naughty, naughty girls!" he added, looking fondly at Sashenka and stealthily at Nastenka, who stood blushing and smiling.

And the nineteen brave Castilians
Heartened by this stirring speech,
Shouted weakly all together
Swaying in their saddles, "Oh,
Santo Iago Compostello!
Glory be to our Don Pedro!
To the lion of Castile!"
But Diego, Pedro's chaplain,
Muttered through his clenchèd teeth,
"Were it I who was the leader
I'd have pledged to meat alone
With some St. Turin to follow."

"There! Didn't I say the same thing?" cried Uncle highly pleased. "The only chap with any common sense in the whole army and he an ordinary chaplain or something too! What was he exactly, Sergei, a captain of theirs or what?"

"He was a monk, an ecclesiastic, Uncle."

"Oh yes, of course! Chaplain, yes, chaplain. I know, I remember now, I've read about them in Anne Radcliffe's novels. They've got different orders or something, haven't they? Benedictines, I believe. Are there any Benedictines?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"Hm. That's what I thought. Well, Ilyusha, how does it go on? Splendid! Excellent!"

And on hearing this Don Pedro
Burst out laughing and pronounced,
"I enjoyed his joke immensely
And I grant him one whole sheep."

"A good time to laugh! What a fool he was! It struck him as funny too, at last. A sheep, he says. That means they did have sheep, so why starve himself? Well, Ilyusha, go on! Splendid! Excellent! It's extraordinarily witty!"

"That's the end, Papa."

"Oh, I see. And really there was nothing else he could do, was there, Sergei? Excellent, Ilyusha. Marvellously well done.

Kiss me, my pet. Oh you darling child! Whose idea was it to teach him, was it yours, Sashenka?"

"No, it was Nastenka's. We sat reading the other day. She read this poem and said, 'What an amusing poem. Let's make Ilyusha learn it by heart and recite it on his name's day. Won't everyone laugh!' "

"So it was Nastenka? Why, thank you, thank you," Uncle mumbled, suddenly blushing like a child. "Give me another kiss, Ilyusha. And you, naughty girl, kiss me too," he said hugging Sashenka and looking fondly into her eyes.

"You just wait, Sashenka my girl, your name's day will come too," he added obviously at a loss for anything better to say in his delight.

I turned to Nastenka and asked her who the poem was by.

"Oh yes, yes, who is it by?" Uncle hastened to say. "The poet must have been a clever man, don't you agree, Foma?"

"Hm..." Foma uttered a low inarticulate sound.

His lips were twisted in a sneer all the while the poetry was being recited.

"I've forgotten, honestly," said Nastenka with a timid glance at Foma Fomich.

"It was Mr. Kuzma Prutkov* who wrote it, Papa, it was published in the *Contemporary* magazine," Sashenka said.

"Kuzma Prutkov? I don't know him," said Uncle. "Pushkin now, that's someone I know. However, one can see he's a poet of merit, don't you think so, Sergei? And, more than that, a man whose virtues are of the noblest, that's as clear as my two fingers. He may even be an officer perhaps....Good for him! The *Contemporary*, incidentally, is an excellent magazine. I must certainly subscribe to it, if all the poets writing for it are like that. I love poets, they're good lads, describing everything in verse! D'you remember, Sergei, that man of letters I met at your place in St. Petersburg? He had a peculiar sort of nose ... really!... What did you say, Foma?"

* The collective pen name of Alexei K. Tolstoi and the Zhemchuzhnikov brothers.

Foma Fomich, who was getting more and more annoyed, gave a loud titter.

"No, nothing, I just..." he said, pretending he could hardly contain his mirth. "Carry on, Yegor Ilyich, carry on. I'll have my say afterwards. There's Stepan Alexeyich, he also enjoys hearing about your acquaintance with the St. Petersburg men of letters."

Stepan Alexeyich who had all this time sat apart, lost in thought, suddenly raised his head, reddened and turned about furiously in his chair.

"You leave me alone, Foma, don't you bait me," he said, glaring at Foma through small, bloodshot eyes. "What's your literature to me? I only pray to God for my own welfare," he muttered under his breath, "and as for the rest, let them all rot, together with their writers, Voltairians that's all they are."

"Did you say authors were Voltairians?" said Yezhevikin, instantly flitting across to Mr. Bakhcheyev. "Your statement is perfectly true, Stepan Alexeyich. That was what Valentin Ignatyich was pleased to say the other day too. He called me another Voltairian, I swear he did; but everyone knows how little I've written so far. It's come to where a bowl of milk turning sour is blamed on Mr. Voltaire as well! It's always the way with us."

"Oh no," Uncle observed importantly, "that's a misapprehension. Voltaire was only a pungent writer, who ridiculed prejudices, but he was never a Voltairian. All this gossip about him was spread by his enemies. Why blame the poor chap for everything, why indeed?"

Foma Fomich tittered maliciously once again. Uncle gave him an uneasy glance and grew noticeably embarrassed.

"I'm still talking about magazines, you see, Foma," he said in confusion trying hard to right any blunder he may have made. "You were quite right, Foma, when you explained to me the need to subscribe the other day. That's what I think too. Hm ... oh well, they really do spread enlightenment. Because what sort of son of the fatherland are you if you don't even subscribe to this? Isn't it true, Sergei? Hm ... yes, in-

deed!... Take the *Contemporary*, for instance.... But d'you know, Sergei, I think that thick magazine is strongest on science ... the what d'you call it, you know the one in the yellow cover."

"It's the *Fatherland Notes*, Papa."

"That's right, the *Fatherland Notes*, an excellent name for it, don't you think, Sergei? The whole fatherland, so to say, sitting down and making notes.... A most noble aim! A most praiseworthy magazine, and how thick, too. Just try and publish a stage coach of a magazine like that! And the sciences it deals with, they all but make your eyes pop! The other day I came in and saw a book lying on the table; I picked it up out of curiosity, opened it, and galloped through three pages at a go. I simply gaped, old chap. And d'you know there was an explanation for everything: it said, for instance, what a broom, a spade, a ladle, and an oven rake were. To my way of thinking a broom is a broom, an oven rake is an oven rake. But nothing doing, old chap. Scientifically, an oven rake is not an oven rake at all, but an emblem or mythology or something of the sort, I don't quite remember what, I only know that it was proved to be something like that. There, you see! They've puzzled out everything!"

I do not know just what Foma meant to do after this fresh outburst of Uncle's, for at that very moment Gavrila appeared and stopped dejectedly in the doorway.

Foma Fomich gave him a meaningful glance.

"Ready, Gavrila?" he asked in a faint but determined voice.

"Ready, sir," Gavrila replied sadly, and sighed.

"And have you placed my bundle in the cart?"

"I have, sir."

"Well then, I too am ready," said Foma and slowly rose to his feet. Uncle stared at him in amazement. The general's lady jumped up and looked about her nervously.

"And now allow me to beg you, Colonel," Foma spoke with dignity, "to interrupt for a moment your interesting lecture on literary oven rakes, you may continue with it when I am gone.

Taking my leave of you for ever, I should like to say a few parting words to you. . . ."

Alarm and amazement petrified all who heard him.

"Why, Foma, Foma! What's the matter with you? Where are you going?" Uncle found voice at last.

"I am going to leave your house, Colonel," Foma said with perfect composure. "I have decided to go wherever my road takes me and that is why I have hired an ordinary peasant cart with my own money. My bundle has now been placed in it: it is not a large bundle; a few of the books I love, a change of clothing, that's all. I am poor, Yegor Ilyich, but nothing in the world would induce me to take your gold now, the gold I spurned yesterday."

"But for heaven's sake, Foma, what does it mean?" cried Uncle, turning as white as a handkerchief.

The general's lady gave a screech and stretching her arms out to Foma Fomich gazed at him in despair. Miss Perepelitsina hurried to support her. The lady companions froze in their chairs. Mr. Bakhcheyev heaved himself up from his.

"They're off now," Mizinchikov whispered close beside me.

Distant rolls of thunder were heard just then: a storm was breaking.

IV

EXPULSION

"I believe you said, Colonel, 'what does it mean?' " Foma spoke with solemn dignity, seeming to relish the general discomfiture. "The question surprises me. Explain to me, for your part, how *you* can bear to look straight into my eyes now? Explain this psychological riddle to me, the ultimate in man's shamelessness, and I shall depart, the richer at least for some new knowledge of the depravity of the human race."

But Uncle was past replying: frightened and crushed, with gaping mouth and goggling eyes, he stared at Foma.

"Lord, how frightening!" moaned Miss Perepelitsina.

"Do you understand, Colonel," Foma continued, "that you must let me go without any ado now, without asking any questions? Living in your home, even I, an elderly, thinking man, have begun to entertain grave fears for the purity of my morals. Believe me when I say that your questions will result in nothing but your own disgrace."

"Foma! Foma!" cried Uncle, and drops of cold sweat appeared on his brow.

"And so, allow me to explain nothing and simply say a few parting words to you, my last words in your house, Yegor Ilyich. The thing is done and connot be undone. I trust that you understand what I am speaking about. But I implore you on my bended knees: control the impulse of your passions if there is a spark of morality left in your heart! And if the pernicious poison has not enveloped the whole building yet, stamp out the fire to the best of your ability."

"Foma, you are mistaken, I assure you!" cried Uncle gradually coming to his senses with a horrible presentiment of what the dénouement would be.

"Restrain your passions," Foma continued in the same tone of solemn dignity as if he had not heard Uncle's exclamation. "Conquer your ego. 'If you want to conquer the world, conquer yourself.' Such is the rule I always follow. You are a landowner: in your domain you should shine like a flawless diamond, and yet what a vile example of dissoluteness you are setting your menials! I spent long nights praying for you and, trembling for you, I tried to find wherein lay your happiness. But I did not find it, for happiness lies in virtue."

"Oh, but this is impossible, Foma," Uncle interrupted again. "You've misunderstood and now you're missing the whole point."

"And so, remember you are a landowner," Foma went on, ignoring Uncle's exclamation once again. "Do not think that leisure and sensuality are the predestined vocation of the landowning class. A noxious thought! It's not leisure but responsibility, responsibility to God, your Tsar and your Fatherland.

A landowner must work, work harder than the meanest of his serfs!"

"Am I supposed to follow the plough instead of my peasants, or what?" grumbled Bakhcheyev. "I'm a landowner too, you know."

"I am addressing you, servants, now," Foma went on turning to Gavrila and Falalei, the latter having just appeared in the door. "Love your masters and do their bidding faithfully and humbly. And for this your masters will love you. And you, Colonel, be fair and compassionate to them. They are mortals like you, God's image, so to say, children entrusted to you by God, your Tsar and the Fatherland. Great is your duty, but your merit is just as great!"

"Foma Fomich! My dear! What d'you want to do?" the general's lady screamed in despair, almost swooning with terror.

"Enough, I think," Foma concluded, ignoring even the general's lady. "Now for the details: they are trifling, I grant that, but essential. Yegor Ilyich, the hay is still uncut in your Kharinskaya Pustosh. Have it cut down and cut down soon, or it will be too late. Such is my advice."

"But, Foma...."

"I know that you were going to chop down the Zyryanov plot of wood: don't do it, that is another piece of advice from me. Preserve the woods, for woods preserve the moisture on the earth's surface. It's a pity that you were so late in sowing the spring crops; it's amazing how late you sowed the spring crops."

"But, Foma...."

"Enough now. There is too much to say and this is not the time for it. I shall send you my directions in writing, in a special notebook. Good-bye then, good-bye to you all. May God bless you and be ever with you. May God bless you too, my child," he went on, addressing Ilyusha, "and may God save you from the pernicious poison of your future passions. May God bless you too, Falalei: forget the Komarinsky dance. May God bless you, and all of you. Do not forget Foma. Let us go, Gavrila. Help me into the cart, you kind, old man."

And Foma started for the door. The general's lady shrieked and rushed after him.

"No, Foma, no! I shan't let you go like that!" cried Uncle and, catching up with Foma, gripped his arm.

"Am I to understand that you would use violence?" Foma questioned haughtily.

"Yes, Foma, violence too," Uncle replied, shaking with excitement. "You have said too much and now you must explain. You have misread my letter, Foma."

"Your letter!" shrieked Foma, instantly flaring up as if he had been timing his explosion for this very minute. "Your letter! Here it is, here it is! I tear this letter to pieces, I spit upon this letter, I trample your letter with my feet, and thus perform humanity's most sacred duty. This is what I do since you are using violence to force an explanation from me. See! See! See!"

And scraps of the letter flew across the room.

"I repeat, Foma, you've misunderstood me," Uncle shouted turning paler and paler. "I am asking for her hand, Foma, I want to find my happiness."

"Her hand! You've seduced that girl and now you are deceiving me with this proposal of marriage, for I saw you with her last night in the garden under a bush!"

The general's lady cried out and fell swooning into an armchair. A frightful bustle ensued. Poor Nastenka was as still and pale as one dead. Frightened, Sashenka held Ilyusha close and shook as in a fever.

"Foma," cried Uncle in a frenzy, "if you divulge this secret you'll be doing the most ignoble deed in the world."

"I shall divulge this secret," shrieked Foma, "and I shall be doing the most noble of deeds! I have been sent down by the Lord Himself to unmask the whole world in its vileness. I am ready to climb on to the thatched roof of a peasant's hut and shout from there about your foul deed for all the neighbouring landowners and all the passers-by to hear. Yes, let everyone, everyone know that last night I caught him with this

most innocent-looking young lady in the garden, under a bush!"

"Oh, how shocking!" squealed Miss Perepelitsina.

"Foma, don't go too far!" Uncle shouted, fists clenched and eyes flashing.

"And he," Foma shrieked on, "he was so frightened by my having seen him that he dared to inveigle me with his lying letter—me, an honest and forthright man—into connivance in his crime—yes, I said crime! for of this pure and innocent girl you have made a...."

"Another word to insult her and I'll kill you, Foma, I swear to you I will."

"I am saying this word, because you *have* made this innocent of innocent girls into the worst of libertines."

No sooner had Foma uttered the last word than Uncle grabbed him by the shoulders, picked him up like a feather, and with all his might flung him against the glass-panelled door leading from the study into the courtyard. The impact was so strong that the unlocked door flew wide open and Foma, rolling down the seven stone steps, measured his length in the courtyard. Broken glass fell tinkling down the steps.

"Gavrila, pick him up," cried Uncle, as pallid as a corpse, "put him into the cart and see that he clears out of Stepanchikovo in two minutes from now."

For all Foma's plotting, he certainly could not have foreseen a dénouement like this.

I do not venture to describe what took place immediately afterwards. There was the heart-rending wail of the general's lady as she collapsed in her chair; Miss Perepelitsina's stupefaction in the face of my heretofore obedient uncle's startling behaviour, the ohs and ahs of the lady companions; Nastenka frightened into a swoon, with her father fussing about her; Sashenka crazed with fright; Uncle pacing the room in extreme agitation, waiting for his mother to come to; Falalei weeping loudly over his masters—all this put together was a scene beyond description. To this I must add that a storm

broke out at that very moment: thunder crashed louder and faster and large drops of rain began knocking on the windows.

"Talk about a jolly holiday!" Mr. Bakhcheyev muttered, hunching his shoulders and spreading out his hands.

"Things are taking a bad turn," I whispered to him. I was also beside myself with agitation. "But anyway Foma's been turned out and won't be brought back."

"Mamma! Have you recovered? are you better? will you hear me out at last?" Uncle begged, stopping beside the old woman's chair.

She raised her head, folded her hands as in prayer and with a pleading look gazed at her son, whom she had never seen so angry in her life.

"Mamma," he went on, "the cup is overfull, you can see that for yourself. It is not thus I wanted to make my announcement but the hour has struck and there's no sense in putting it off. You have heard the slander, now listen to my defence as well. Mamma, I love this honest and noble girl. I've loved her for a long time and I shall never cease to love her. She will make my children happy and will be the most obedient of daughters to you, and therefore now, in the presence of all of you, my family and my friends, I solemnly lay my plea at her feet and implore her to do me the inestimable honour of consenting to become my wife."

Nastenka started, then blushed all over and jumped to her feet. The general's lady stared at her son for a while without understanding, it seemed, what it was he was saying to her, and suddenly with a piercing shriek fell on her knees before him.

"Yegor my son, my dearest heart, bring Foma Fomich back!" she screamed. "Bring him back at once or I'll die without him before the day is done."

Uncle was petrified by the sight of his old mother, so wilful and capricious, on her knees before him. A feeling of pain showed in his face: recovering his senses at last, he hastened to help her up and seat her in her armchair again.

"Bring back Foma Fomich, Yegor my son!" the old woman took up her wail again, "bring him back, the dear heart. I can't live without him!"

"Mamma!" Uncle cried in chagrin. "Didn't you hear anything of what I said to you just now? I cannot bring back Foma, try to understand it, I cannot, nor do I have the right to after the lowest of foul aspersions cast by him on this angel of honour and virtue. Do you not understand, Mamma, that I am in duty bound, that my honour commands me to vindicate virtue now? You have heard me: I seek the hand of this girl and I implore you to give your blessing to our union."

The general's lady leapt up from her chair again and fell on her knees before Nastenka.

"Oh my dear! My dear girl!" she shrieked, "don't marry him! Don't marry him, but plead with him to bring back Foma Fomich, my dear! Oh my dear, dear Nastasya Yevgrafovna, I'll give you all I have, I'll make any sacrifice for you if only you refuse to marry him. I'm old but I haven't come to the end of my money yet, I have a few scraps left after my dear departed. It's all yours, my dear, I'll give you everything, and Yegor will give you everything too, only don't bury me alive, plead with him to bring back Foma Fomich."

The old woman would have gone on wailing and screaming for a long time had it not been for Miss Perepelitsina and all the lady companions rushing forward to help her up, shrieking and moaning in their indignation that she was kneeling before a hired governess. Nastenka was so frightened she could hardly stand on her feet, and Miss Perepelitsina actually burst into angry tears.

"You'll be the death of your mamma," she screamed at Uncle. "You'll be the death of her! And as for you, Nastasya Yevgrafovna, you should not have caused a quarrel between mother and son: the Lord Himself forbids it...."

"Hold your tongue, Anna Nilovna," cried Uncle. "I've stood enough!"

"And I, too, have stood enough from you. How can you reproach me with my defencelessness? It's easy enough to hurt

the defenceless. But I'm not your slave yet! I'm a major's daughter myself! I shan't set foot in your house again, I shall not . . . as from today."

But Uncle was not listening: he went up to Nastenka and reverently took her hand.

"Nastasya Yevgrafovna, did you hear my proposal?" he said, looking at her with anguish, almost with despair.

"No, Yegor Ilyich, no! Let's say no more!" Nastenka replied, in utter dejection. "It's all useless," she went on, pressing his hands and dissolving in tears. "It's only because of last night that you . . . but it cannot be, you know that yourself. We were wrong, Yegor Ilyich . . . I shall always think of you as my benefactor and . . . and I shall always, always pray for you."

Her voice broke off for tears. Evidently poor Uncle had foreseen this answer for he did not even attempt to insist or remonstrate with her. Silent and crushed, he listened, bending over her and still holding her hand in his. Tears welled up in his eyes.

"I already told you yesterday," said Nastenka, "that I cannot be your wife. You see, they do not want me here . . . and I knew it, I knew all this long ago. Your mamma will not give us her blessing, nor will the *others*. Even if you in your unparalleled generosity have no regrets afterwards, you will still be unhappy because of me . . . with your kind nature."

"Kind nature, exactly! Soft and kind, I should say! That's it, Nastenka, that's it," her old father, standing on the other side of her chair, put in. "It's precisely this little word that had to be used."

"I do not wish to be the cause of discord in your home," Nastenka continued. "And do not worry about me, Yegor Ilyich: no one will harm me or hurt me. I shall leave with my Papa . . . this very day. It's best to say good-bye, Yegor Ilyich. . . ."

And poor Nastenka again burst into tears.

"Nastasya Yevgrafovna, can this be your final word?" said Uncle, looking at her with inexpressible despair. "Say just one word and I shall sacrifice everything for you."

"It's her last, her final word, Yegor Ilyich," Yezhevikin put in again, "and she has explained it all so splendidly to you that, frankly, I never even expected it of her. You're the kindest of men, Yegor Ilyich, you are indeed, and you have done us a great, a very great, honour. Still, we are no match for you, Yegor Ilyich. The bride you want, Yegor Ilyich, must be rich, of noble birth, a picture of beauty, with a say of her own too, and she must walk about your rooms a-glitter with diamonds and covered with ostrich feathers. And then perhaps Foma Fomich would concede a little point and give you his blessing. You will bring Foma Fomich back, you know. It's a pity, a great pity that you have treated him so poorly; he said all those things to you from the goodness of his heart, from too much ardour. You yourself will say so afterwards that it was his goodness of heart—you'll see. A most worthy man he is. And now he'll get soaked through. Since you'll have to bring him back anyway, wouldn't it be best to bring him back at once?"

"Bring him back, bring him back!" shouted the general's lady, "the dear man is right in what he says!"

"And then there is your mother too," Yezhevikin went on "grieving and weeping. Do bring him back. And in the meantime, Nastya and I will start on our way."

"Wait, Yevgraf Larionich," cried Uncle, "I beg you! There will be one more word, Yevgraf, just one more word."

Saying this he walked away to the far end of the room, sat down in an armchair, dropped his head and covered his eyes with his hands as if he were thinking something over.

At that moment a frightening thunder-bolt crashed directly overhead, it seemed. The whole house shook. The general's lady screamed, Miss Perepelitsina screamed too, while the lady companions, stupefied with fright, crossed themselves as did Mr. Bakhcheyev.

"Elijah the prophet have mercy on us!" five or six voices whispered together.

There was such a frightful downpour following the thun-

der-clap that it seemed as if a whole lake had suddenly emptied on Stepanchikovo.

"Think of Foma Fomich, what will happen to him out in the open now?" piped Miss Perepelitsina.

"Yegor my son, bring him back!" the general's lady cried in a desperate voice and madly rushed to the door. The hangers-on held her back: they surrounded her, comforted her, whimpered and shrieked. The uproar was truly awful.

"He went out in his frock-coat, if only he'd taken his overcoat with him," Miss Perepelitsina piped on. "He didn't take his umbrella either. And now he'll be struck down by lightning."

"He certainly will," Bakhcheyev took up, "and what's more, he'll get soaked in the rain afterwards."

"You, at least, should keep quiet," I whispered to him.

"But he's a human being, isn't he?" Mr. Bakhcheyev replied angrily. "He's not a dog, you know. I bet you wouldn't go out of doors now. Go and take a dip in the rain for the fun of it!"

Aware that a climax was due and afraid of what it would be, I went up to Uncle who seemed to have frozen in his chair.

"Uncle," I said bending close to his ear, "surely you will not agree to bring back Foma Fomich? You must understand that it will be the height of indecency, at any rate with Nastasya Yevgrafovna still here."

"My friend," Uncle replied, raising his head and looking into my eyes with an air of determination, "I have been judging myself as I sat here, and I know now what I have to do. Have no fear, Nastenka will not be hurt, I shall arrange it so."

He got up from his chair and went to his mother.

"Mamma, calm your fears," he said. "I shall bring Foma Fomich back, I shall overtake him, he cannot have gone far yet. But I swear that he will only come back on one condition; here, in the presence of all the witnesses to the insult, he will have to publicly acknowledge his guilt and solemnly beg this noblest young lady's forgiveness. I shall insist upon it! I shall compel him, or else he will not cross the threshold of this house. I also swear to you solemnly, Mamma, that if he agrees

to this of his own free will, I shall be willing to prostrate myself at his feet, and give him everything, everything I can give him without wronging my children. As for myself, I am withdrawing from everything this very day. The star of my happiness has set. I am leaving Stepanchikovo. You may all live here in peace and happiness. And I shall return to my regiment—and live my desperate lot in stormy fray and battle. Enough! I must go!"

At that same moment the door opened, and to everyone's astonishment there stood Gavrila, wet through and covered with mud from head to toe.

"What's been happening to you? Where have you been? Where's Foma?" cried Uncle, starting towards Gavrila.

Everyone rushed forward after him and, avidly curious, surrounded the old man from whose clothes muddy water was streaming. Squeals, gasps, and cries accompanied every word of Gavrila's.

"I left him beside the birch wood, a verst and a half from here," he began in a sorrowful voice. "Lightning frightened the horse and it darted into the ditch."

"And. . ." cried Uncle.

"The cart overturned."

"And Foma?"

"He fell into the ditch."

"Oh hurry up, tell us the rest, you tormentor."

"He hurt his side and wept. I unharnessed the horse and rode it here to tell you."

"And did Foma stay there?"

"He got up, and went on his way with his staff," Gavrila concluded. He sighed and hung his head.

The weeping and sobbing of the fair sex could not be put into words.

"Polkan!" cried Uncle and rushed out of the room. Polkan was brought to the door, Uncle leapt on to the unsaddled horse, and a minute later the thudding of hoofs announced that the chase after Foma Fomich had begun. Uncle galloped away without even a cap.

The ladies rushed to the windows. Bits of advice could now be heard amid their gasping and moaning. There was talk of a hot bath at once, of rubbing Foma Fomich down with alcohol, of breast tea, of Foma Fomich not having had anything to eat since early morning, "not a morsel, and now he's on an empty stomach." Miss Perepelitsina found his spectacle case with the spectacles inside left behind by him, and her find produced an extraordinary effect: the general's lady fell upon the spectacles, wailing and weeping and, without letting them go, clung to the window once more to watch the road. The anxiety of waiting was now keyed up to breaking point. In another corner of the room Sashenka was comforting Nastenka: they both wept with their arms about each other. Nastenka held Ilyusha's hand and kissed her pupil good-bye again and again. Ilyusha was sobbing loudly, without knowing the reason why. Yezhevikin and Mizinchikov were standing apart, discussing something. I fancied that Bakhcheyev, too, was about to start whimpering as he looked at the girls. I went up to him.

"Oh no, my good man," he said to me, "Foma Fomich would leave perhaps, but the time is not ripe for it yet: they haven't provided any gold-horned bulls to draw his carriage yet! Don't worry, my good man, he'll drive his hosts out but he'll stay."

The storm was over and Mr. Bakhcheyev's views had obviously undergone a change.

Suddenly someone cried, "They're bringing him, they're bringing him" and the ladies rushed shrieking to the door. It was less than ten minutes since Uncle had galloped away, and it seemed impossible that Foma could have been back so soon; the riddle was very easily solved, as we were to learn. Foma Fomich, having let Gavrila go, had really gone on his way "with his staff," but finding himself all alone in the wind, thunder-storm, and pouring rain, he grew frightened most ignominiously, and, turning back to Stepanchikovo, followed Gavrila at a run. Uncle found him when he was already back in the village. A passing cart was stopped at once, the villag-

ers came running and helped the subdued Foma Fomich in. And so, he was delivered straight into the open arms of the general's lady, who was so horrified at the state he was in that she all but went out of her mind. He was even muddier and wetter than Gavrila. The fuss they raised was awful: they wanted to take him upstairs at once to change into dry clothes; they shouted for elderberry wine and other tonics, and scurried senselessly about the room; everyone spoke at once. But Foma seemed not to notice anyone or anything. He was led in, supported on either side. When he reached his armchair, he lowered himself into it heavily and closed his eyes. Someone cried that he was dying; a horrible wail broke out; Falalei howled more than the others as he tried to fight his way through the crowd of ladies to Foma Fomich in order to kiss his dear hand without delay....

V

FOMA FOMICH ARRANGES EVERYONE'S HAPPINESS

"Where have they brought me?" Foma uttered at last in the tone of a man dying in the cause of justice.

"The damn whiner," Mizinchikov whispered close beside me. "As if he can't see where they've brought him. There'll be no end to his fits and fancies now."

"You're with us, Foma, you're among friends," cried Uncle. "Cheer up, set your mind at rest. And, honestly, don't you think you'd better change your clothes, Foma, or you'll take cold.... Wouldn't you like to fortify yourself with something, eh? I mean to say a little glass of something, to get warm."

"A glass of Malaga perhaps," Foma moaned, closing his eyes again.

"Oh, Malaga, I don't think we have any," said Uncle looking worriedly at Praskovya Ilyinishna.

"But we have, we have!" Praskovya Ilyinishna responded eagerly, "we've four whole bottles left," and with a clatter of

her keys, ran off to fetch the Malaga, urged on by the screams of all the ladies surrounding Foma as thick as flies attracted to a pot of jam. As for Mr. Bakhcheyev his indignation had reached boiling point.

"It's Malaga he wants now," he grumbled almost aloud. "Asking for the sort of wine that no one drinks. Tell me, who ever drinks Malaga nowadays unless he's another scoundrel like him? Bother and curse them all! And what am I standing here for? What am I waiting for?"

"Foma, now that you ... now that you've rested, and..." Uncle said, stumbling over every word, "you're with us again ... that is, what I wanted to say, Foma, was that this afternoon, having accused the most innocent of beings, so to say...."

"Where is it, where is my innocence?" Foma rejoined as though he were raving or in a fever, "where are those happy days of mine? Where are you, my happy childhood, when I, innocent and beautiful, ran about the fields chasing butterflies in spring? Where, where are those days? Give me back my innocence, give it back to me."

And Foma, arms spread wide, appealed to everyone in turn as if one of us had his innocence in his pocket. Bakhcheyev almost burst with anger.

"Look what he wants now," he growled furiously. "He wants his innocence back! Does he want to kiss it or something? Maybe even as a child he was as much of a brigand as he is now! I swear he was."

"Foma," Uncle made another attempt.

"Where are they, where are the days when I still believed in love and loved man? When I embraced man and wept on his breast?" screamed Foma. "And now—where am I, where am I?"

"You're with us, Foma, calm down," Uncle cried out. "And this is what I wanted to say to you, Foma."

"You, for one, could hold your tongue now," Miss Perepelitsina hissed with a malicious glint in her snake-like eyes.

"Where am I?" Foma went on. "Who surrounds me? It's buffaloes and bulls, turning their horns against me. Life, what

are you? You may live on and on, be disgraced, dishonoured, belittled, beaten, and when earth has been piled on your grave only then people will come to their senses and crush your poor bones with a monument."

"Heavens, he's beginning to talk of monuments!" Yezhevikin whispered, throwing his hands up in dismay.

"No, erect no monument for me," Foma screamed. "Do not erect one for me! I want no monuments. Erect a monument for me in your hearts, for I want nothing more, nothing, nothing!"

"Foma," Uncle broke in. "Come now, calm down, don't talk about monuments. Just hear me out.... You see, Foma, I do understand that you may have been burning with a noble fire, so to say, when you upbraided me earlier today: but you were carried away beyond the limits of virtue, Foma—I assure you that you were mistaken, Foma."

"Won't you ever stop?" Miss Perepelitsina squealed again. "Do you want to kill the poor man because he's in your hands?"

Next to start up was the general's lady, and after her the whole of her retinue: they all began to gesticulate and motion Uncle to silence.

"Anna Nilovna, keep silent yourself, and as for me I know what I'm talking about," Uncle replied with firmness. "It's a sacred matter. It's a matter of honour and justice. Foma, you're reasonable, you must apologize at once to this noblest of young ladies whom you have insulted."

"What young lady? What young lady have I insulted?" uttered Foma looking round at everyone in bewilderment, as if he had completely forgotten the whole incident and did not understand what it was all about.

"And Foma, if you frankly and honestly acknowledge your mistake now, of your own free will, I swear to you, Foma, that I shall fall at your feet, and...."

"Whom could I have insulted?" wailed Foma. "What young lady? Where is she? Where is this young lady? Tell me something of this young lady so that I should remember."

At that, Nastenka, embarrassed and frightened, came up to Yegor Ilyich and tugged at his sleeve.

"No, Yegor Ilyich, leave him alone, I want no apologies. What's the use of it all?" she spoke in a tone of entreaty. "Don't go on."

"Ah! I'm beginning to remember now," cried Foma. "Lord! I'm beginning to remember. Oh, help me, help me to remember," he begged, looking terribly agitated. "Tell me, is it true that I was driven away from here like the mangiest of dogs? Is it true that I was struck by lightning? Is it true that I was thrown out of here down the steps? Is it true? Is it true?"

The weeping and screaming of the fair sex provided Foma Fomich with the most eloquent of answers.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, "I'm beginning to remember, I'm beginning to remember now, that after the lightning and my fall, I fled from here, pursued by the thunder, to perform my duty and disappear for ever. Help me up. Weak though I feel now, I must do my duty."

He was helped up at once. Foma struck the pose of an orator and stretched out his hand.

"Colonel," he cried, "I have now recovered my senses completely. The thunder-storm has not deprived me of my mental faculties: I am still deaf in the right ear it is true, but the thunder-storm is not as much to blame for it perhaps as my fall down the steps. But what does it matter! And who cares about Foma's right ear!"

Foma put so much wistful irony in these last words of his, and accompanied them with a smile so pathetic that the ladies were deeply moved and their moans broke out again. Some looked in fury and all with reproach at poor Uncle who was already beginning to shrink and wilt at this unanimous expression of public opinion. Mizinchikov walked away to the window in disgust, while Bakhcheyev who could hardly keep still nudged me more and more sharply with his elbow.

"And now, listen to my confession all of you," cried out Foma, treating everyone present to a proud and determined look, "and at the same time decide poor Opiskin's fate as well.

Yegor Ilyich, I have long been watching you, watching you with a sinking heart, and I saw everything, everything before you even had an inkling that I was watching you at all. Colonel, I may have been mistaken, but I knew your egoism, your boundless vanity, your phenomenal sensuality, and who can blame me for involuntarily trembling with apprehension for the honour of the most innocent of young ladies?"

"Foma, Foma!... Don't say too much, Foma," cried Uncle, watching Nastenka's martyred expression uneasily.

"What worried me more than this young lady's innocence and trustfulness, was her inexperience," Foma went on, as if he had not heard Uncle's warning. "I saw that a tender feeling was blossoming in her heart like a rose in spring, and involuntarily I recalled Petrarch's saying, 'Innocence often treads on the brink of ruin.' I was anxious and suffered and though I would willingly pledge my life's blood for this maiden, who is as pure as a pearl, who would give me a pledge for you, Yegor Ilyich? Knowing the unbridled urge of your passions, knowing that you would sacrifice everything for a fleeting moment of gratification, I was suddenly plunged into an abyss of horror and alarm for the fate of this noblest of young ladies."

"Foma, how could you have thought that?" cried Uncle.

"I watched you with a sinking heart. If you want to know what anguish I went through ask Shakespeare: his *Hamlet* will tell you of the turmoil in my soul. I became suspicious and terrible. In my anxiety, in my indignation I saw everything in a dark light, and you may be sure it was not the dark light they sing about in that well-known romance. That is why you saw me wanting to remove *her* from this house: I wanted to rescue her. That is why I have been so irritable of late, so rancorous against the human race. Oh, who will reconcile me with mankind now? I feel I may have been too exacting and unfair to your guests, to your nephew, to Mr. Bakhchcyev, tasking him with his astronomy: but who will blame me for the turmoil in my soul at the time? Referring to Shakespeare again, I will say that I envisaged the future as a gloomy gulf of unfathomable depth, on the bottom of which

lay a crocodile. I felt it was my duty to forestall disaster, that I was appointed, brought into the world for it—and what happened? You failed to appreciate my soul's noblest impulses, and repaid me with malice, ingratitude, mockery, and humiliation."

"Foma! If you mean that, then ... of course ... I feel ..." cried Uncle in extreme agitation.

"If you really do feel it, Colonel, kindly hear me out instead of interrupting me. To continue: consequently, I was only guilty of taking this child's future and fortune too much to heart: for compared to you she is still a child. My sublime love for the human race turned me, for the time, into a sort of demon of wrath and suspicion. I wanted to attack people and tear at them. And do you know, Yegor Ilyich, all your actions were unfortunately such that they bore out my suspicions at every step and confirmed all my misgivings. Do you know that yesterday, when you showered me with your gold in order to dismiss me, I thought: 'In my person he is dismissing his conscience, the easier to commit his crime.' "

"Foma, Foma, did you really think that yesterday?" Uncle cried, horrified. "Good Lord, and I never even suspected anything."

"Divine providence itself inspired me with these misgivings," Foma continued. "And judge for yourself, what was I to think when blind chance brought me to that fatal garden bench that same evening? What did I feel at that moment when—oh God!—with my own eyes I suddenly saw all my suspicions proving so glaringly correct at last? I did retain a shred of hope though, very flimsy, of course, but it was hope nonetheless—and what happened? You yourself shattered it this morning, reducing it to dust and ruins. You sent me that letter of yours; you announce your honourable intentions: you implore me to keep the secret.... 'But why,' thought I, 'why is he only writing it now that I've caught him and not before? Why did he not come running to me before, happy and beautiful—for love makes a face beautiful—why did he not throw himself into my fond embrace then, why did he not weep tears of

infinite joy on my breast and tell me all, all?' Or am I a crocodile who would only have devoured you instead of giving you good advice? Or am I some loathsome beetle who would have only bitten you instead of assisting in promoting your happiness? 'Am I a friend or the most loathsome of insects?' such was the question I asked myself this morning. 'And then why,' thought I, 'what for did he bring his nephew from the capital and try to arrange a match between him and the young lady, if not to deceive us and his frivolous nephew together, while covertly persisting in his most criminal of criminal intentions?' Oh no, Colonel, if anyone, it was you, and you alone who cemented my belief that your mutual love was criminal! What's more, you have committed a crime against this young lady as well, for through your own blundering behaviour and selfish mistrustfulness you have exposed her, pure and virtuous, to slander and grave suspicion."

Uncle remained silent with drooping head: evidently Foma's eloquence had defeated all his arguments and he already felt an absolute criminal. The general's lady and her companions listened to Foma in mute reverence, while Miss Perepelitsina glanced with malicious triumph at poor Nastenka.

"Astounded, vexed and crushed," Foma continued, "I locked myself into my room this morning and prayed to the Lord for enlightenment and guidance. At last I made up my mind to put you to the test publicly and for the last time. I may have applied myself to the task with too much fervour, I may have succumbed to my indignation: but for my noblest of motives you threw me out of the window. As I fell out of the window I thought to myself: 'That is the way virtue is always rewarded in this world.' At this I struck the ground, and I hardly remember what happened to me afterwards."

Squeals and moans interrupted Foma Fomich at this tragic recollection. The general's lady made a dash towards him with the bottle of Malaga in her hands, which she had just snatched away from Praskovya Ilyinishna's hands, but with a regal gesture Foma waved away both Malaga and the general's lady.

"Stop!" he cried. "I must finish. What happened after my

fall, I do not know. All I know is that I am standing here now, wet and liable to catch cold, for the purpose of securing your mutual happiness. Colonel, a number of signs, which I do not wish to go into now, have convinced me at last that your love is pure and even lofty, though at the same time criminally mistrustful. Beaten, humiliated, and suspected of insulting a young lady to defend whose honour I, like a medieval knight would spill my blood to the last drop—I venture to demonstrate to you here and now how Foma Opiskin avenges his wrongs. Give me your hand, Colonel."

"With pleasure, Foma," cried Uncle, "and since you've quite cleared yourself now in regard to the honour of the noblest of young ladies ... certainly ... here is my hand, Foma, together with my repentance."

And Uncle offered him his hand warmly, unsuspecting as yet of what was to come of it.

"And you, give me your hand too," Foma went on in a weak voice, moving aside the crowd of ladies surrounding him and addressing Nastenka.

Nastenka grew confused and flustered, and looked timidly at Foma.

"Come closer, come closer, my dear child! It is essential for your happiness," Foma added gently, without releasing his hold on Uncle's hand.

"What is he up to now?" said Mizinchikov.

Frightened and trembling, Nastenka slowly walked up to Foma and timidly gave him her hand.

Foma took this hand and placed it in Uncle's.

"I join your hands and bless you," he pronounced in a voice of great solemnity. "And if the blessing of a sufferer crushed with grief may benefit you, then be happy. Such is Foma Opiskin's revenge. Hurrah!"

The general amazement was extreme. The dénouement was so unexpected that it somehow paralyzed everyone. The general's lady stood agape, with the bottle of Malaga clutched in her hands. Miss Perepelitsina turned pale and shook with fury. The lady companions threw up their hands and stood turned

to stone. Uncle trembled and tried to say something, but could not. Nastenka turned deathly pale, and timidly uttered that "it cannot be," but it was already too late. Bakhcheyev was the first—he must be given his due—to catch up Foma Fomich's hurrah, I followed him, and after me Sashenka cheered at the top of her lilting voice and instantly made a rush to embrace her father; Ilyusha joined in next, then Yezhevikin, and Mizinchikov after everyone else.

"Hurrah!" Foma cried again. "Hurrah! Down on your knees, children of my heart, down on your knees before this fondest of mothers. Ask for her blessing and, if need be, I myself shall go down on my knees before her together with you."

Uncle and Nastenka, with not yet a glance at one another, frightened and apparently understanding nothing of what was happening to them, fell on their knees before the general's lady: everyone crowded around them, but the old woman seemed shocked into immobility without at all knowing what she should do next. Foma saved this situation as well: he himself fell at the feet of his patroness. All her bewilderment was gone at once. Weeping copiously she brought out, at last, that she consented. Uncle jumped to his feet and crushed Foma in an embrace.

"Foma, Foma!" he uttered, but his voice broke and he could not go on.

"Champagne!" roared Stepan Alexeyich. "Hurrah!"

"No, not champagne," cried Miss Perepelitsina, who had already gathered her wits together and had sized up both the situation and the consequences. "We should put up a candle to the Almighty, pray at the icon and bless them with the icon, the way all pious people do it."

They all rushed at once to act upon this sensible advice: a frightful commotion ensued. Someone had to light the candle. Stepan Alexeyich pulled up a chair and climbed on to it to light the candle in front of the icon, but the legs gave way and he jumped down heavily without, however, losing his balance. Not in the least put out, he quickly and deferentially ceded the honour to Miss Perepelitsina. This slender maiden

managed the whole thing in a twinkling, and got the candle burning. The nun and the lady companions began to cross and prostrate themselves before the icon. The image of the Saviour was then taken down and handed to the general's lady. Uncle and Nastenka knelt before her once again, and the ceremony was performed to the pious admonitions of Miss Perepelitsina who kept prompting them, "Touch the floor with your forehead, kiss the icon, kiss Mamma's hand." Mr. Bakhcheyev thought he should kiss the icon too after the engaged couple, and Mamma's hand as well. He was too delighted for words.

"Hurrah!" he shouted again. "Now we really shall have some champagne!"

As a matter of fact, everyone was delighted. The general's lady wept, but these were tears of joy: a union, blessed by Foma, instantly became a decent and sacred thing in her eyes, but more than that, she felt that Foma Fomich had outdone himself and would now remain with her for ever and ever. All the lady companions, at least outwardly shared in the general delight. Uncle either fell on his knees before his mother and kissed her hands, or rushed to embrace me, Bakhcheyev, Mizinchikov, and Yezhevikin. He all but strangled Ilyusha in his embrace. Sashenka rushed to kiss and embrace Nastenka, while Praskovya Ilyinishna dissolved in tears. Noticing this, Mr. Bakhcheyev went up to her and kissed her hand. Old Yezhevikin was so moved he wept in a corner, wiping his eyes with his not overclean check handkerchief. Gavrila whimpered in another corner, gazing reverently at Foma, while Falalei, sobbing at the top of his voice, came up to everyone in turn and kissed everyone's hand. All were overcome with emotion. No one said anything yet, or made any explanations: everything seemed to have been said already, it was just a chorus of joyful ejaculations. No one yet understood how everything had come to be settled so suddenly and so well. One thing was obvious: it was Foma Fomich who had done it all and that this was a vital and indisputable fact.

Before this general happiness was five minutes old, Tatyana Ivanovna appeared among us suddenly. How, by what sixth

sense could she have learned so soon in her room upstairs that there was love and an engagement in the house? She flitted in with a radiant face, with tears of happiness in her eyes, dressed with charm and elegance (she had changed meanwhile), and hurried forward, with loud cries, to embrace Nastenka.

"Nastenka, Nastenka! You loved him and I did not know it," she cried. "Heavens! They loved each other, they suffered in silence, in secret, and were persecuted! How romantic! Nastenka, my pet, tell me in all honesty: do you really love this madman?"

Instead of replying Nastenka embraced and kissed her.

"Heavens, what a charming romance!" and Tatyana Ivanovna clapped her hands in delight. "Listen, Nastenka, listen, my angel: all these men, every one of them, are graceless brutes and not worthy of our love. But he may be the best of the lot. Come here, you madman," she cried turning to Uncle and catching hold of his hand. "Can you be in love? Are you capable of love? Look at me, I want to look into your eyes: I want to see if these eyes are lying or not. No, no, they are not lying: love shines in them. Oh, how happy I am. Nastenka, my friend, listen, you are not wealthy: I shall give you a gift of thirty thousand. Take it, I beg you. I don't need it, I don't, I shall have plenty left. No, no, no, no," she screamed and waved her hands in protest seeing that Nastenka was about to refuse. "Don't say anything either, Yegor Ilyich, it's no concern of yours. No, Nastenka, I'm quite determined to give it to you, I wanted to do it a long time ago, I was only waiting for you to fall in love for the first time. I shall feast my eyes upon your happiness. You'll hurt me if you refuse. I'll cry, Nastenka.... No, no, no, no."

Tatyana Ivanovna was so elated that it was quite unthinkable and even a pity to cross her at a moment like this. No one ventured to, and it was decided to leave it till later. She hastened to kiss the general's lady, Miss Perepelitsina, and all of us. Bakhcheyev squeezed his way through to her and in the most deferential manner begged permission to kiss her hand.

"You dear lady, my dearest soul, forgive me, the old fool, for this afternoon: I did not know you had a heart of purest gold!"

"Madman, I saw through you long ago," Tatyana Ivanovna chirped with ecstatic playfulness, gave the man's nose a fillip with her glove, and flitted away from him like a zephyr, her full skirts swishing against him. The fat man stepped back deferentially.

"The worthiest of young ladies," he uttered sentimentally. "They did stick that German's nose on, you know," he whispered to me confidentially, looking into my eyes happily.

"What nose? What German?" I asked in surprise.

"Why that imported one, the one who kisses his frau's hand while she wipes her tears away with a handkerchief. My Yevdokim mended it yesterday, and this morning, the minute we got back from our chase, I sent a man on horseback to fetch it. It'll be here soon. An excellent thing."

"Foma!" cried Uncle in frenzied elation. "You are the author of our happiness. What can I ever do to repay you?"

"Nothing, Colonel," replied Foma with sham humility. "*Go on ignoring me,* and be happy without Foma."

He was obviously piqued: they seemed to have forgotten all about him amid the general effusion.

"It's because we're so happy, Foma," Uncle cried. "I hardly realize where I am, old chap. Listen, Foma, I have wronged you. It will take more than my life, more than my life's blood to right the wrong, which is why I now say nothing, nor even beg for your forgiveness. But if ever you have need of my head, my life, if ever the need arises for me to throw myself into a gaping void for you, give the command and you shall see. I shall say no more, Foma."

Uncle ended with a gesture of finality, fully realizing that there was nothing else he could add the more forcefully to express his meaning. He only gazed at Foma with eyes brimming with gratitude and tears.

"See what an angel he is," Miss Perepelitsina piped up in her turn in praise of Foma.

"Yes, yes," Sashenka chimed in, "I never knew you were so good, Foma Fomich, and I was disrespectful to you. Forgive me, Foma Fomich, I promise you I'll love you with my whole heart now. If you only knew how deeply I respect you now."

"Yes, Foma," Bakhcheyev said next, "forgive me, fool that I am, too. I did not know you, no, I did not. You're not simply a learned man, Foma Fomich, you're a hero into the bargain! My home is at your disposal. But the best thing you could do, my dear fellow, is come to my place the day after tomorrow, and bring the general's lady too, and the newly engaged couple as well—why, let's make it a big affair—bring the whole household to my place. The dinner we'll have, I'll tell you! That is, I shan't brag beforehand, but I'll say one thing, there's nothing I won't provide for you but pigeon's milk perhaps. My solemn word of honour."

In the midst of these outpourings Nastenka also came up to Foma Fomich, and without further ado embraced him warmly and kissed him.

"Foma Fomich," she said, "you are our benefactor: you've done so much for us that I really don't know how to repay you for all this. All I know is that I will be the fondest and most respectful of sisters to you."

She could not finish: tears choked her words. Foma kissed the top of her head and himself shed a tear.

"My children, children of my heart," he said. "Live, prosper and sometimes in moments of bliss give a thought to this poor exile. For myself I shall say that misfortune is perhaps the mother of virtue. I believe Gogol said that, a frivolous writer, but some of his thoughts have a grain of truth in them. Exile is misfortune. Homeless, I shall go wandering in the world with my staff, and who knows, perhaps I shall attain to even greater virtue through my misfortunes. This thought is my last remaining comfort."

"But where will you go, Foma?" Uncle cried in alarm.

Everyone started and hurried to Foma.

"But can I remain in your house after what you did this morning, Colonel?" Foma queried with extraordinary dignity of manner.

They did not let him speak: his words were drowned in the general outcry. They seated him in his armchair, pleaded with him, wept over him, and I don't know what else they did with him. Needless to say, he had never even toyed with the idea of leaving "this house," either then, that morning, the day before, or when he had defiantly gone digging in the kitchen-garden. He knew that he would be piously detained, that they would clutch at him especially now that he had made everyone happy, when they had believed in him anew, when everyone was eager to make much of him and feel honoured and happy to have the privilege. However, his cowardly reappearance that morning, when he took fright in the thunder-storm, must have tweaked his vanity somewhat, goading him on to more heroics; but the main thing was this wonderful chance to pose, to hold forth so satisfyingly, to describe, enlarge upon and extol his own virtues so, that he could not possibly resist the temptation. Nor did he: he struggled free from those holding him back; he peremptorily called for his staff, he pleaded with them to give him his freedom, to let him go with the four winds; that in "this house" they had dishonoured and beaten him; that he had only come back to make everyone happy; that, finally, could he remain in this "house of ingratitude and eat food which, though filling, was seasoned with beatings?" He stopped struggling at last. They settled him back in his chair again, but his eloquence refused to be stemmed.

"Was I not insulted here?" he screamed on. "Did not people stick their tongues out at me here? Did not you yourself, Colonel, like any ignorant street urchin of the shopkeeper class show me ficoes every hour of the day? Yes, Colonel, I stand for this comparison because even if you did not show them to me physically, they were moral ficoes just the same; and moral ficoes are even more offensive than physical ones in some cases. I shan't speak of the beatings. . . ."

"Foma! Foma!" cried Uncle. "Don't kill me with the recollection. I've told you already that it will take more blood than there is in me to wash away this wrong. Oh, be magnanimous! Forget, forgive, and remain to contemplate our happiness. The fruits of your labours, Foma."

"I want to love man, to love man," screamed Foma, "but I have not this man, I am forbidden to love, I am deprived of that man. Give me, give me a man so I could love him. Where is that man? Where is that man hiding? Like Diogenes with his lantern I have been looking for him all my life but I cannot find him, and I can love no one until I have found that man. Woe to him who made me a hater of mankind. I invoke: give me a man so I could love him, and they offer me Falalei. Is it Falalei I will come to love? Will I want to love Falalei? Can I love Falalei even if I want to? No, and why not? Because he is Falalei. Why do I not love mankind? Because all, all there is in the world is a Falalei or resembling a Falalei. I do not want Falalei, I hate Falalei, I spit upon Falalei, I shall crush Falalei, and if I had to make a choice I'd more readily love Asmodeus than Falalei. Come, come here, my inveterate tormentor, come here!" he shouted turning abruptly on Falalei who stood on tiptoe behind the crowd, peeping innocently over the heads at Foma Fomich. "Come here. I shall prove to you, Colonel," Foma screamed pulling Falalei, who was stark with terror, up closer. "I shall prove to you the truth of my words about these everlasting jibes and ficoes. Tell me, Falalei, and tell me truthfully: what did you dream of last night? You shall see, now. Colonel, you shall see what you have planted. Well, Falalei, speak up!"

The poor lad, shaking with fright, looked about him in despair, seeking salvation in someone, anyone. But they all merely trembled and awaited his reply with terror.

"Well then, Falalei, I'm waiting."

Instead of answering, Falalei screwed up his face, opened his mouth wide and bellowed like a young bull.

"Colonel, what do you think of this stubbornness? Surely it

is not natural! I'm asking you for the last time, Falalei, tell me what did you dream of last night?"

"Of. . . ."

"Tell him you dreamed of me," Bakhcheyev prompted.

"Of your virtues, tell him," Yezhevikin whispered in his other ear.

Falalei only turned his head this way and that.

"Of . . . of your virt . . . of the white b-bull!" he mumbled at last and burst into scalding tears.

Everyone gasped. But Foma Fomich was in a fit of extraordinary magnanimity.

"Anyway I see you are sincere, Falalei," he said, "a sincerity which I do not observe in others. Go in peace. If you are harassing me with this dream purposely, at the instigation of others, then God will give you and those others their due. If not, then I respect your sincerity for even in the meanest of God's creatures, such as you, it is my custom to discern God's own image and semblance. I forgive you, Falalei. My children, embrace me, I shall stay."

"He's staying," everyone cried in delight.

"I shall stay and I shall forgive. Colonel, reward Falalei with some sugar: let him not weep on this day of bliss."

Needless to say, such magnanimity was found amazing. Showing *such* concern at a moment *like this* and for whom, for Falalei! Uncle dashed off to execute the order about the sugar. That same instant a silver sugar bowl appeared in Praskovya Ilyinishna's hands—heaven knows from where. With a trembling hand Uncle first took out two lumps, then changed his mind to three, dropped them, and realizing that he'd never manage in his excitement, cried:

"Here goes, the occasion calls for it. Here, take it, Falalei," and he emptied the whole sugar bowl into the boy's bosom. "It's for being sincere," he added by way of admonition.

"Mr. Korovkin," Vidoplyasov announced, suddenly appearing in the door.

There was a slight commotion. Korovkin's visit was obviously ill-timed. All looked questioningly at Uncle.

"Oh, Korovkin," Uncle cried in some confusion. "I'm glad ... of course," he added with a timorous look at Foma, "but I really don't know if we ought to receive him now, at a moment like this. What do you think, Foma?"

"Never mind, never mind," Foma pronounced graciously, "ask Korovkin in too, let him share in the general happiness as well."

In a word, Foma Fomich was in an angelic frame of mind.

"I venture to state with your permission," Vidoplyasov observed, "that Mr. Korovkin is not quite himself."

"Not himself? How? What rubbish is this?" cried Uncle.

"Exactly what I say: he is in an inebriated state of mind."

The solution followed the riddle before Uncle had time to open his mouth, flush, grow frightened and embarrassed to the last extreme. Korovkin himself appeared in the doorway, motioned Vidoplyasov aside with a hand, and confronted the astonished party. This was a short but thickset gentleman of forty or so, with dark, slightly greying cropped hair, a purple round face and tiny bloodshot eyes; he was wearing a tall haircloth cravat secured behind with a buckle, a frightfully shabby tail-coat with feathers and bits of hay adhering to it and badly split under one arm, a pair of *pantalons impossibles*, and was holding an incredibly greasy cap at arm's length. The gentleman was absolutely drunk. On reaching the middle of the room, he paused, swaying and nodding his head as if pecking with his nose in drunken meditation; a smile spread slowly over his face.

"I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I've ... so to say ... put some here." (He flipped his collar.)

The general's lady instantly assumed an air of outraged dignity. Foma, sitting in his chair, measured this eccentric visitor with an ironic eye. Bakhcheyev looked at him in perplexity behind which, however, there showed a glimmer of sympathy. As for Uncle, he was frightfully embarrassed: he felt for Korovkin with all his heart.

"Korovkin, listen," he began to say.

"*Attendez*," Korovkin cut him short. "At your service: a child of nature.... But what's this I see? There are ladies here.... Now why didn't you tell me, you brute, that you had ladies here?" he added looking at Uncle with a roguish smile. "Never mind! Chin up!... let's meet the fair sex too.... Charming ladies," he began, articulating with difficulty and getting stuck over every word, "you see a poor unfortunate who... oh well, and so forth.... The rest remains to be understood.... Musicians, strike up a polka!"

"Wouldn't you care for a nap?" asked Mizinchikov, calmly going up to Korovkin.

"A nap? Is any insult implied?"

"Far from it. It's good after a journey, you know."

"Never!" Korovkin objected indignantly. "D'you think I'm drunk? Not at all. However... where do they sleep here?"

"Come, I'll take you there directly."

"Where? To the shed? Oh no, brother, you can't fool me. I've spent a night there already.... However, lead the way. After all, why not go with a good chap? I don't need a pillow, a soldier doesn't need a pillow. Fix up a sofa, brother, a nice little sofa. And look," he added stopping, "you're an understanding fellow, I see: fix me up some ... you know, some rum-co, just a drop, enough to drown a fly in... all I want is enough to drown a fly in ... a little glass, that is."

"I will, I will," Mizinchikov replied.

"You will.... Wait a moment, I must say good-bye, mustn't I? *Adieu, mesdames* and *mesdemoiselles*. You have, so to say, pierced my... never mind, however, we'll go into explanations afterwards... but do wake me up when it begins... or even five minutes before... and don't you begin without me, d'you hear me? don't you begin."

And the jolly gentleman disappeared, following Mizinchikov.

No word was said. All were still in a state of bewilderment. At last, Foma began to chuckle, silently and inaudibly at first, but ever louder and stronger until he roared with laughter. Seeing this, the general's lady brightened up too, although her

face still wore the expression of outraged dignity. Spontaneous laughter began to break out here and there. Uncle stood as though stunned, blushing painfully and unable to bring out a word.

"Good Lord," he managed to say at last, "who could've expected it? But then... but then it might happen to anyone. Foma, I assure you, he's a man of honesty and honour, and, in fact, he's an exceptionally well-read man. Foma... you'll see for yourself."

"I can see it now," replied Foma, choking with laughter, "a remarkably well-read man, well-read is precisely the word for him."

"You should hear him talk about railways," put in Yezhevikin in an undertone.

"Foma," cried Uncle, but his voice was drowned in the laughter. Foma Fomich simply roared. Looking at him Uncle began laughing too.

"Oh well, never mind," he said with feeling. "You are magnanimous, Foma, you have a great heart: you have given me my happiness... and you will also forgive Korovkin."

The only person who did not laugh was Nastenka. She gazed at her *fiancé* with eyes alight with love as though saying:

"What a splendid, kind, and noble man you are really, and how I love you!"

VI

CONCLUSION

Foma's triumph was complete and unshakable. And indeed, nothing could have been settled without him and the accomplished fact overruled all doubts and arguments. The gratitude of the couple he had made happy knew no bounds. Uncle and Nastenka protested violently when I tried to give them a slight hint of the process by which Foma's consent to their marriage had been obtained. Sashenka cried, "Foma Fomich is kind, kind! I'll embroider a cushion for him in wool." And she even

put me to shame for my hard-heartedness. Stepan Alexeyich, the proselyte, would have strangled me, I believe, had I spoken disrespectfully of Foma Fomich in his presence. He now followed Foma everywhere like a faithful dog, gazed at him worshipfully, and added to every word he said, "You *are* a noble-minded man, Foma! You are a learned man, Foma." As for Yezhevikin, his elation could not go further. The wily old man had noticed a very, very long time ago that Nastenka had turned Yegor Ilyich's head, and ever since then he had cherished a dream of marrying his daughter off to him. He had spun the affair out as far as it would go, and had only renounced his dream when it was impossible not to renounce it. Foma had altered matters. For all his elation, the old man saw through Foma Fomich of course. In short, it was obvious that Foma Fomich was now established in this house for ever, and that his despotism would be boundless. It is a known fact that even the nastiest, the most capricious of people curb their tempers for a time at least when their desires are satisfied. Not so Foma Fomich. On the contrary, success made him even more fatuous, vain and conceited. Just before dinner, after having changed his clothes, he settled down in his armchair, summoned Uncle and, in the presence of the entire household, began to preach a new sermon to him.

"Colonel," he began. "You are about to enter upon holy matrimony. Do you realize the responsibility...."

And so on and so forth: Imagine ten pages of the *Journal de Débats* size in the smallest typescript, filled with the wildest drivel which said nothing at all of responsibilities and merely sang the most shameless praises to the intellect, meekness, generosity, courage and disinterestedness of Foma Fomich himself. Everyone was hungry, everyone wanted dinner, nevertheless no one dared protest, and everyone reverently listened to this rubbish to the end. Even Bakhcheyev, though suffering pangs of hunger, sat through it deferentially, without even stirring. Foma Fomich, his eloquence appeased at last, grew merrier and even got quite tipsy at dinner, proposing the most extraordinary toasts. He indulged in witticisms and jokes at the

expense of the newly engaged couple, of course. All laughed and clapped their hands. But some of his jokes were so smutty and suggestive that even Bakhcheyev was discomfited. At last Nastenka jumped up and ran away from the room. This delighted Foma Fomich immensely, but he was quick to react: briefly but forcefully he outlined Nastenka's virtues and pronounced a toast in her absence. Uncle, perplexed and distressed a minute ago, was now prepared to embrace Foma Fomich. Altogether Uncle and Nastenka seemed to be shy of one another and of their happiness, and I noticed that since receiving the blessing no word had passed between them, they even seemed to be avoiding each other's eyes. When we rose from the table Uncle suddenly disappeared. My search for him brought me to the terrace. There, ensconced in an armchair with an after-dinner cup of coffee, sat Foma, very much the worse for drink. He was holding forth. His only listeners were Yezhevikin, Bakhcheyev and Mizinchikov. I paused to listen.

"Why," bellowed Foma, "why am I prepared to be burnt at the stake for my convictions without a moment's hesitation? And why are none of you men enough to be burnt at the stake? Why? Why?"

"But that would be overdoing it, wouldn't it, Foma Fomich, going to the stake, I mean," Yezhevikin teased him. "And what's the good of it? Firstly, it's painful, and secondly, they'll burn you and what'll be left?"

"What will be left? Noble ashes, that's what'll be left. But it's not for you to understand, not for you to appreciate me. For you no great men exist except all those Caesars and Alexanders of Macedon or something. And what did your Caesars do? Whom did they make happy? What did your precious Alexander of Macedon do? Conquered the whole world, did he? Why, give me a phalanx like his and I'll conquer it too, and you will, and he will.... But then he killed the worthly Clitus, and I have not killed the worthy Clitus. A greenhorn! A scoundrel! He ought to be whipped and not celebrated in world history ... and Caesar, too, for good measure."

"Have mercy on Caesar at least, Foma Fomich."

"I shan't have mercy on the fool!" bawled Foma.

"And don't," Stepan Alexeyich, also tipsy, supported him with heat. "They don't deserve mercy: all of them are strutters, all they do is twist and turn on one leg. Sausage-makers! That one, for instance, who wanted to endow some scholarship or other. And what is this scholarship, I ask you? The devil alone knows what it means. I bet it's some new-fangled trick. And that other one, swaying on his feet and asking for rum in polite society! What I say is, why not have a drink? Go on, drink, I say, drink but make a break, and then drink on if you want to. They don't deserve mercy. Swindlers, all of them. You're the only learned one, Foma."

Bakhcheyev, once he surrendered to somebody, surrendered body and soul, unconditionally and admitting of no criticism.

I found Uncle in the garden beside the pool, in the most secluded spot. He was with Nastenka. On seeing me, Nastenka shot away into the bushes guiltily, as it were. Uncle came forward to meet me with a beaming face: tears of joy filled his eyes. He took both my hands in his and gripped them hard.

"My friend," he said, "I cannot quite believe in my happiness yet. Nastenka too. We can only marvel and bless the Almighty. She has been crying just now. Would you believe it, I somehow can't recover my senses yet, I'm all confused, and I can't, I can't believe it! What have I done to deserve this? What? What have I done? How have I earned it?"

"If anyone has deserved it, it's you Uncle," I said warming to my words. "I haven't yet met a man as honest, as good and as kind as you...."

"No, Sergei my boy, no, that's too much," he replied with something like regret. "That's the worst of it that we're kind (that is, I mean myself alone) when everything is well with us; but when things are bad, don't you come near us. Nastenka and I have just been talking about this. How long has Foma been shining like a jewel before me, but would you believe it, it was not until just now that I came to believe in him entirely, although I myself have tried to convince you he was perfection itself; even his refusal of a gift such as I offered him

yesterday did not make me believe in him. More shame on me for this. My heart shrinks at the recollection of what happened this morning. But I lost control over myself. When he said that about Nastenka, it was as if something had set its teeth into my very heart. I did not understand, and acted like a tiger."

"Oh well, Uncle, it may have only been natural."

Uncle waved my suggestion away.

"Oh no, no, old chap, don't say that. It's all simply due to the depravity of my nature, because I am a gloomy and sensual egoist and abandon myself to my passions without restraint. That's what Foma says too. (What could I say to that?) You have no idea, Sergei my boy," he continued with profound feeling, "how often I have been irritable, cruel, unfair, and arrogant, and not towards Foma alone either! It all suddenly came back to me now, and somehow it shames me to think that I have done nothing yet to deserve such happiness. Nastenka has been saying the same thing just now, though honestly I don't know what sort of sinner she could be because she's more an angel than a mortal. She told me that we are frightfully indebted to God, that we should try to be kinder now, to do nothing but good deeds. And if you could have only heard how passionately, how beautifully she spoke of all this. Oh heavens, what a girl!"

He paused for breath in agitation. A minute later he resumed.

"We have decided, old chap, to cherish Foma, Mamma and Tatyana Ivanovna particularly. What did you think of Tatyana Ivanovna? What a noble soul! Oh, how guilty I am towards everyone! Towards you too. But should anyone dare hurt Tatyana Ivanovna now, I, oh, I.... Oh well, why say more? We ought to do something for Mizinchikov as well."

"Yes, Uncle, I've changed my mind about Tatyana Ivanovna now. One cannot but feel respect and compassion for her."

"Exactly, exactly," Uncle cried feelingly. "One cannot but respect her. Take Korovkin, for instance, you're probably

laughing at him now," he added, glancing timidly into my face, "and we all laughed at him this afternoon. And yet it may have been unpardonable of us . . . he may be the best and kindest of men, but fate, you know . . . he's known adversity. . . . You don't believe me, but it may be really so."

"Oh no, why shouldn't I believe you, Uncle?"

And, enthusiastically, I went on to aver that the most fallen of creatures may yet retain the loftiest human feelings; that the depths of a mortal's soul were inexplorable; that the fallen should not be despised but on the contrary sought out and put back on their feet; that the accepted standards of virtue and morality were wrong, and so on and so forth—in short, I was incensed and even told him of the natural school. I ended up by reciting the poetry: "*When from the darkness of delusion. . . .*"

Uncle was absolutely delighted.

"My friend, my friend," he said, deeply moved. "You understand me perfectly, and you've put into better words than I ever could all that I myself wanted to express. Yes, yes. Oh Lord, why is there meanness in man? Why am I mean so often, when it's so good, so wonderful to be kind? Nastenka, too, has been saying the same thing just now. But look, isn't this a nice spot?" he added looking about him. "How generous nature is! What a picture! Look at that tree, eh! A man couldn't clasp it about. What life-giving juices, what leaves, what sunlight! Look how jolly and sort of washed everything looks after the rainstorm. It makes you think that trees have some intelligence of their own too, that they can feel and are enjoying life. Surely it must be so, eh? What do you think?"

"It's very likely, Uncle. In their own way, of course."

"Well, of course, in their own way. . . . Oh marvellous, marvellous Creator! Why, you must remember the whole of this garden well, Sergei, and the way you played and ran about here when you were a little boy. I remember you as a little boy, you know," he added, looking at me with an ineffable expression of love and happiness. "They wouldn't let you go near the pond alone. D'you remember one evening when my

late Katya called you to her and began to fondle you... you'd been running about the garden and were all red and hot: your hair was so fair and curly.... She played and played with your ringlets and then said, 'It was good of you to take this poor orphan into your home.' D'you remember?"

"Very vaguely, Uncle."

"It was late afternoon, I remember, and the sun shone down on both of you, and I sat in my corner smoking a pipe and looking at you two. I go into town every month, Sergei, and visit her grave," he added in a softened voice which quivered with suppressed tears. "I was just telling Nastenka about it, she said that we'd now go together."

Uncle fell silent and tried to master his emotion.

Vidoplyasov came up to us just then.

"Vidoplyasov?" Uncle cried, startled. "Has Foma Fomich sent you?"

"No, sir, it's more on my own account I've come."

"Why, that's fine! We'll learn all about Korovkin now. I've wanted to ask about him earlier. I told him to watch Korovkin, Sergei. Well then, what's up, Vidoplyasov?"

"Allow me to say," said Vidoplyasov, "that yesterday you were kind enough to speak of my request and promise me your high protection against those daily insults."

"Surely you can't be talking about your name again?" Uncle cried in alarm.

"But what can I do? Those hourly insults...."

"Ah, Vidoplyasov, Vidoplyasov! What am I to do about you?" Uncle said despondently. "Now, what insults are you talking about? You'll just drive yourself insane, you know, and end up in the madhouse."

"I should think my mind..." Vidoplyasov tried to put in.

"To be sure, to be sure," Uncle cut him short, "I'm saying this for your own good, old chap, and not to hurt your feelings at all. Well then, what grievances have you? I bet it's some sort of nonsense."

"They won't let me be."

"Who won't?"

"All of them and Matryona particularly. It's through her I've entered upon this life of misery. It's well known that all people of excellence who ever saw me since I was a child have always said that I looked like a foreigner, with the features of my face mostly. And now, sir, they never let me be on account of this. Every time I go past they all start calling out all sorts of bad words after me; even the little children, who want a whipping more than anything else, call out too. Just now, as I was on my way here, they shouted too. I can't stand it any more. Shield me under your wing, sir!"

"Ah, Vidoplyasov! What is it they call out? I'm sure it's something silly that you should simply ignore."

"It's too indecent to say."

"But what is it?"

"It sickens me to say it."

"Oh, speak up."

"Grishka's Dutch, an orange he'll munch."

"Oh you are a one! And I thought it was heaven knows what. Don't take any notice, just go on your way."

"I tried it, but they shouted even louder."

"I say, Uncle," I said. "His complaint is that they're making life miserable for him in this house. Send him away to Moscow for a while then, to that calligrapher. You told me, didn't you, that he used to stay with some calligrapher or other?"

"Oh no, old chap, that one came to a tragic end too."

"How?"

"The gentleman had the misfortune to appropriate something that didn't belong to him," said Vidoplyasov, "for which, in spite of his talent, he was sent to prison where he died never to return."

"Very well, Vidoplyasov, very well, don't worry any more for the moment, I'll go into all this and settle matters," said Uncle. "I promise you. Now, what about Korovkin? Still asleep?"

"No, sir, he has just left. I came here to tell you, sir."

"What do you mean left? Why did you let him go?" cried Uncle.

"Through the kindness of my heart, sir: I was sorry for him. The moment he woke up and remembered the whole story, he slapped himself on the head and yelled at the top of his voice. . . ."

"At the top of his voice?"

"To be more respectful: he uttered all kinds of plaints. He shouted that he could not show himself to the fair sex now, and then added, 'I'm not worthy of the human race.' And he said all this so plaintively, in such choice words."

"A man of refinement! I told you, Sergei, didn't I. . . . But how could you let him go, Vidoplyasov, when it was you I ordered to watch him? O Lord, O Lord!"

"Through my heartfelt pity, mostly. He asked me not to tell. The driver who brought him took him back after feeding his horses here. As for the sum, handed him three days ago, he asked me to thank you humbly, and tell you that he'd send the money back to you by early post."

"What sum is that, Uncle?"

"The gentleman mentioned 25 rubles in silver," said Vidoplyasov.

"I lent it to him at the station, old chap, for he was short of money. Of course he'll send it by the first post. O Lord, I *am* sorry. Should we send someone after him, perhaps, Sergei my boy?"

"No, Uncle, you'd better not."

"That's what I think too. You see, Sergei I'm no philosopher, of course, but I do think that every man has much more good in him than you'd think judging by appearances. That goes for Korovkin too: he could not stand the shame. However, let us go to Foma. We've tarried, and he might take exception to our ingratitude and thoughtlessness. Let's go. Ah, Korovkin, Korovkin!"

The novel is finished. The lovers are united and their good genius has definitely established itself in the house, in the per-

son of Foma Fomich. One could go into a great many pertinent explanations on this point, but in actual fact all these explanations are quite superfluous now. Such, anyway, is my opinion. Instead of any explanations I shall merely say a few words about the further destinies of all the heroes of this story: without this, of course, no novel is complete, and it is even prescribed by the rules.

The two who "owed their happiness to Foma," were married six weeks after the events described here. It was a quiet family affair, without too much display or too many guests. I was Nastenka's attendant, while Mizinchikov was best man. There were guests, too, of course. But needless to say Foma Fomich was the most important person there, second to none. He was waited upon and made much of. However, quite inadvertently, his glass was overlooked when more champagne was poured out and he started a fuss at once, complete with rebukes, screams, and shouts. Foma ran to his own room, locked himself in, and screamed that they were slighting him now that "new people" had come into the family, that he was nothing but a bit of flotsam which had to be thrown out. Uncle was in despair; Nastenka wept; the general's lady had a fit as usual. The wedding feast was more like a funeral. It was for seven years that poor Uncle and poor dear Nastenka were thus fated to live with their benefactor, Foma Fomich. To the day of his death (Foma Fomich died last year) he moped, sulked, made difficulties, nursed grudges and scolded, but the veneration of the couple who "owed their happiness to him," rather than diminish, increased with every day in proportion to his caprices. Yegor Ilyich and Nastenka were so happy with one another that they even feared for their happiness, believing that God had really granted them too much, that they were not worthy of such mercies, and supposed that in later life they were perhaps fated to atone for their happiness by suffering and tribulations. Naturally in a house of such humility Foma Fomich could do whatever he fancied. And what did he not do in those seven years! The flights of untrammelled fancy which his satiated, idle soul

indulged in occasionally in inventing the most subtle, morally-Lucullan caprices, defy description. The old lady died three years after Uncle's wedding. The bereaved Foma was overcome with despair. To this day at Uncle's they speak in awed tones of the state he was in at the time. When they were filling in the grave, he struggled to go in too and screamed that they should bury him with her. They let him use no knife or fork for a whole month after that; and one day it took four of them to force his mouth open and take out a pin which he wanted to swallow. An onlooker, who had witnessed the struggle, observed that Foma Fomich could have swallowed that pin a thousand times during the struggle, and yet he had not. This suggestion, however, was received with downright indignation and the one who had suggested it was there and then accused of hard-heartedness and indecency. Nastenka alone said nothing and smiled very, very slightly, which made Uncle glance at her with some anxiety. On the whole, it must be said that although Foma went on bullying Uncle's household and enjoying his caprices as before, those despotic and grossly impudent railings of his, which he used to practise at will on Uncle, were no more. Foma complained, wept, reproached, chided, and shamed, but he no longer vituperated as before—there were no more scenes like the one with "His Excellency," and this, I believe, was Nastenka's doing. Almost imperceptibly she forced Foma to give in on some points and submit on some others. She refused to see her husband humiliated, and achieved recognition of her wishes in this respect. Foma understood well enough that she almost saw through him. I say *almost* because Nastenka too cherished and pampered Foma, and even joined in whenever her husband began to sing lavish praises to his sage. She wanted to make others respect everything in her husband, and therefore publicly supported his attachment to Foma Fomich. But I am certain that Nastenka's heart of gold had really made her forget all the old wrongs: she forgave Foma everything when he joined her hand with Uncle's, and, besides, I believe that she earnestly and whole-heartedly adopted Uncle's idea that one

should not be too exacting with a "sufferer" and one-time clown, but should on the contrary minister to his wounded heart. Poor Nastenka was herself one of the *humiliated*; she had suffered herself and remembered it. Within a month Foma quietened down, he even became gentle and meek, but instead he began to have other, quite unexpected fits: he would fall into a sort of magnetic sleep, frightening everyone out of their wits. For instance, the sufferer would be talking and even laughing when all at once he would become petrified, and petrified he would be in precisely the attitude he was in the moment preceding the fit. If, for instance, he was laughing, the smile would remain on his lips; if he was holding something, say a fork, this fork would remain aloft in his raised hand. Afterwards his hand would drop, of course, but Foma Fomich would be past feeling and would not remember dropping his hand. He would sit there with his eyes open and even blinking, but he would say nothing, hear nothing and understand nothing. This would last for a whole hour sometimes. Naturally, everyone in the house all but died of fright, walked on tiptoe with bated breath, and wept. Foma would wake up at last, feeling utterly spent, and would insist that he saw and heard absolutely nothing at the time. To think how far a man could carry his affected posing that he was willing to endure hours of voluntary torture only so as to be able later to say, "Look at me, my very senses are keener than yours!" Finally, Foma Fomich invoked a curse on Uncle for his "hourly insults and disrespect," and left to stay with Mr. Bakhcheyev. Stepan Alexeyich who, since Uncle's wedding, had had many a quarrel with Foma Fomich which, however, always ended in his coming and begging Foma's forgiveness, applied himself to the matter with extraordinary ardour on this occasion: he welcomed Foma enthusiastically, stuffed him with dinner to bursting point, and instantly decided to make his breach with Uncle formal and even lodge a complaint against him. They had a disputable stretch of land somewhere, which, incidentally, they never disputed the ownership of because Uncle was quite willing to cede it to Stepan Alexeyich without any lit-

igation. Without another word Mr. Bakhcheyev ordered his carriage and galloped off to town where he made out a petition and filed it, begging the court to adjudge the land to him formally with subsequent compensation for loss and damages and thus punish arbitrariness and greed. Meanwhile, Foma, feeling homesick at Mr. Bakhcheyev's, forgave Uncle, who came pleading for pardon the very next day, and started back for Stepanchikovo. The wrath of Mr. Bakhcheyev on returning from town to find Foma gone was terrible; but three days later he came to Stepanchikovo in contrition, begged Uncle's forgiveness tearfully and withdrew his petition. Uncle arranged a reconciliation between him and Foma Fomich the same day, and once again Stepan Alexeyich followed Foma about like a little dog and accompanied his every word with: "You *are* a clever man, Foma, you *are* a learned man, Foma."

Foma Fomich now lies buried beside the general's lady. A costly tombstone of white marble covered all over with tearful quotations and eulogistic inscriptions stands over his grave. Sometimes, when they are out for a stroll, Yegor Ilyich and Nastenka turn into the churchyard and kneel before Foma's grave in veneration. Even now they cannot speak of him without deep emotion, recalling his every word, the food he ate, and what he liked. His personal articles are treasured. Feeling utterly bereaved, Uncle and Nastenka grew even closer to one another. God has granted them no children, which grieves them sorely, but they dare not repine. Sashenka has long been married to a splendid young man. Ilyusha is at a Moscow school. And so Uncle and Nastenka now live alone and simply dote on one another. Their concern for one another has grown into something morbid. Nastenka is always praying. If one of them should die first, the other would not survive a week, I think. But God grant them long life. They give all their callers a hearty welcome and gladly share all they have with anyone who is less fortunate. Nastenka is fond of reading the lives of the saints, and is wont to say with contrition that ordinary good deeds are not

enough, that they ought to give away all they have to the destitute, and be happy in poverty. Had it not been for his responsibility to Sashenka and Ilyusha, Uncle would have done this long ago, for he is in complete agreement with his wife in everything. Praskovya Ilyinishna lives with them and delights in doing everything to please them; she also keeps house for them. Mr. Bakhcheyev proposed to her soon after Uncle's wedding but she refused him flatly. An inference was drawn from this that she would take the veil, but no, she did not. There is one remarkable characteristic in Praskovya Ilyinishna's nature: the need to reduce herself to nought before those she has come to love, to efface herself before them every hour of the day, gaze raptly into their eyes, obey their every whim, care for them, and serve them. Now that her mother, the general's lady, is dead she considers it her bounden duty never to part from her brother and truckles to Nastenka in everything. Old Yezhevikin is still alive and has lately taken to visiting his daughter more and more often. In the beginning he drove Uncle to despair by almost completely estranging himself and his small fry (which is what he calls his children) from Stepanchikovo. He remained immune to all Uncle's pressing invitations—it was not so much his pride as his touchiness and his morbid sensitiveness which were almost like a disease with him sometimes. The thought that he, a poor man, should be received in a well-to-do home out of sheer charity, that they might think him importunate and tiresome, distressed him. Sometimes he even refused Nastenka's money and only accepted enough for the barest of necessities. He flatly refused to take anything at all from Uncle. Nastenka was very much mistaken when she told me that day in the garden that her father was playing the clown *for her sake*. It is true that he was terribly keen on getting Nastenka married off, but he acted the clown simply to satisfy an inner urge, to give an outlet to his accumulated spleen. The need to mock and make cutting remarks was in his blood. For instance, he himself caricatured the basest and most obsequious of flatterers, but at the same time he let it be clearly seen that he was only doing it

for show; and the more cringing his flattery, the more caustic and overt the mockery behind it. It was just a way of his. They managed to place all his children in the best schools of Moscow and St. Petersburg, but only after Nastenka had proved to him that it was all being done at her own private expense, that is, out of the thirty thousand given her by Tatyana Ivanovna. Truth to tell, she had never taken the money from Tatyana Ivanovna; but to appease her and not let her feel hurt or disappointed they promised to turn to her for help should any unforeseen family need arise. And that is what they did: for appearances' sake, they took two rather substantial loans form her at two different times. But Tatyana Ivanovna died three years ago, and Nastenka received her thirty thousand after all. Poor Tatyana Ivanovna's death was sudden. The whole family was to have attended a ball at one of the neighbouring landowners, and no sooner had she put on her ball-dress and pinned a lovely wreath of white roses on her hair, than she suddenly felt faint, sat down in an armchair, and passed away. They buried her with the wreath on her head. Nastenka was in despair. Tatyana Ivanovna had been a cherished member of the household, and they had looked after her as if she were a child. There was such good common sense in her will that it amazed everyone. Apart from Nastenka's thirty thousand, the entire estate amounting to as much as three hundred thousand in notes, was to go towards the bringing up of poor orphaned girls and providing them with money on leaving school. The year Tatyana Ivanovna died, Miss Perepelitsina got married. After the death of the general's lady Miss Perepelitsina had remained with Uncle in the hopes of worming her way into Tatyana Ivanovna's favour. In the meantime the former official and owner of Mishino lost his wife—that same little Mishino village where we once had trouble with Obnoskin and his mamma over Tatyana Ivanovna. This official was a frightfully litigious fellow and had six children by his first wife. Suspecting that Miss Perepelitsina had some money, he began to prepare the way to a proposal with the help of his friends, and she promptly accepted him. Miss Perepelitsina, however,

was as poor as a church mouse: all she had was three hundred rubles in silver, and even that was Nastenka's wedding gift to her. And now they bicker from morn till night. She pulls his children's hair and thrashes them; as for her treatment of him (so people say at least) she scratches his face and keeps throwing her superior station of a major's daughter into his face. Mizinchikov is settled in life too. Very sensibly he abandoned all his hopes of marrying Tatyana Ivanovna and turned to agriculture, studying it step by step. Uncle spoke of him to a certain wealthy count, who owned an estate of three thousand souls eighty versts from Stepanchikovo, and who used to come down for an occasional stay there. Observing an aptitude for the work in Mizinchikov and bearing in mind Uncle's recommendation, the count offered him the post of steward of his estates, dismissing his former steward, a German, who in spite of his celebrated German honesty used to fleece the count shamelessly. Within five years the estate became unrecognizable: the peasants prospered, branches of farming, heretofore unthinkable, were developed; the income was almost doubled—in short, the new steward acquitted himself excellently and became a byword all over the gubernia for his skill in farm management. Imagine the count's astonishment and grief when five years later to the day Mizinchikov resigned the post and retired in spite of the count's pleas and promised increases in salary. The count believed that he had been lured away by one of the neighbouring landowners or even by someone from another gubernia. Great was everyone's surprise when two months after resigning his post, Ivan Ivanovich Mizinchikov suddenly appeared owner of a splendid estate with a hundred souls, exactly forty versts away from the count's, which he had bought from some hussar who had run through a fortune, a whilom friend of his. He immediately mortgaged the hundred souls and a year later acquired sixty in the neighbourhood. He is a landowner of consequence now, and in the management of his lands he is unexcelled. It is a wonder to all: where did he suddenly get the money? Some merely shake their heads. But Ivan Ivanovich is perfectly easy in his mind and feels that he

has acted rightfully. He has sent for his sister from Moscow, the sister who gave him her last three rubles for a pair of boots when he started out for Stepanchikovo—a very sweet girl, no longer in her first youth, meek, loving and well-educated, but terribly cowed. Until then she had been eking out a homeless existence in Moscow as paid companion to some benefactress or other; and now she worships her brother, keeps house for him, considers his word law, and herself perfectly happy. Her dear brother is not over-indulgent with her and ill-treats her rather; but she does not notice it. Everyone at Stepanchikovo has grown awfully fond of her, and Mr. Bakhcheyev, they say, is not indifferent to her. He would certainly propose but he dreads a refusal. Incidentally, we hope to talk about Mr. Bakhcheyev another time, in another story, in more detail.

This, I believe, accounts for all my heroes... ah yes, I forgot: Gavrila has greatly aged and has forgotten all the French he ever knew. Falalei has grown into a very decent driver, and poor Vidoplyasov was in a madhouse for many years where, I believe, he died. I'll be going to Stepanchikovo one day soon and I shall make sure to ask Uncle about him.

TO THE READER

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